

NWCCU POLICIES | ACCREDITATION ACTIONS

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU or Commission) seeks to ensure fair, equitable, and consistent actions on accreditation. This Policy identifies Commission actions.

Application and Determination of Candidacy and Accreditation Actions

Initial Review by NWCCU Staff

NWCCU may decline or accept an institution's inquiry about application for accreditation as outlined in the [Accreditation Criteria Policy](#).

Within thirty (30) days of receipt of an Application for Consideration of Eligibility, the Commission will make an initial determination on the Application.

If the Institution's Application is accepted, it will be reviewed by NWCCU staff for compliance with Eligibility Requirements. NWCCU's staff may reject the Application if it does not demonstrate compliance with Eligibility Requirements. This is not an adverse action subject to appeal. The institution may submit a new Application for Consideration of Eligibility after one year.

If NWCCU staff determines the Application appears to demonstrate compliance with Eligibility Requirements, the institution will be asked to prepare a self-evaluation report and schedule a peer evaluation visit. Following consideration of the Application for Consideration of Eligibility, self-evaluation report, and peer evaluation report, the Board of Commissioners will review the information and vote on Candidacy status at the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting.

Candidate Action

The Board of Commissioners may grant Candidate for Accreditation status when an institution meets the Eligibility Requirements, meets Standards for Accreditation at an acceptable level, and has the potential to fully meet all Standards for Accreditation within five years. A [teach-out plan](#) is required for candidate institutions under Commission policy and *34 CFR § 602.23(f)(1)(ii)*.

In preparation for review for Accreditation, the institution will prepare a self-study evaluation report in accordance with the Commission's Accreditation Review Cycle. NWCCU may ask the institution to emphasize specific areas and will set a deadline by which the self-study evaluation and on-site evaluation visit must occur. The Commission will take a separate action on the teach-out plan and teach-out agreements. The institution may not be in Candidacy for more than five years under *34 CFR § 602.16(a)(2)*.

Accreditation Action

The Commission may grant Accreditation to a Candidate institution when it meets the Eligibility Requirements, and substantially meets Standards for Accreditation, Policies, and applicable federal regulations. The institution will undergo its next Self-Study Evaluation in its assigned

accreditation review cycle. Accreditation will apply retroactively back to the date of Candidacy for benefit of students to facilitate transfer, eligibility for licensure, and other purposes. The retroactive date of accreditation is only available to institutions granted accreditation after July 1, 2020. The action may stipulate that the institution emphasize specific areas in the next self-study report.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation Actions

NWCCU may Reaffirm Accreditation when the institution meets the Eligibility Requirements, and substantially meets Standards for Accreditation, Policies, and applicable federal regulations. The institution will undergo its next Self-Study Evaluation in accordance with its accreditation review cycle. The action may stipulate that the institution emphasize specific areas in its next self-study report. The action may require that the institution complete ongoing monitoring activities. NWCCU may request further evidence of accreditation compliance in an ad hoc report or in Annual Report(s) prior to the next Self-Study Evaluation. The reaffirmed institution may also be asked to prepare follow-up reports. The action will specify the due date and which Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations must be addressed by the Institution.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation Actions Following Non-Compliance Actions

NWCCU may Reaffirm Accreditation following a non-compliance action when the institution has provided evidence that demonstrates it meets the Eligibility Requirements, and substantially meets Standards for Accreditation, Policies and applicable federal regulations under a written timeline set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR §602.20(a)(2)*. An ad hoc report is required for a Reaffirmation Action that follows a non-compliance action. A report will be followed by an evaluation team visit for reaffirmation after a probation or show cause action. A report may be required with a follow-up evaluation team visit for reaffirmation after a warning action. NWCCU may request further information in the Annual Report or through an ad hoc report when the institution is in compliance, but the Commission determines additional oversight is needed. NWCCU may ask the institution to emphasize specific areas in the next self-study report.

Non-Compliance Actions

Warning

NWCCU may issue a warning to an institution that its accreditation may be in jeopardy when it does not appear to be in compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations but the institution: appears to demonstrate capacity to make improvements and return to compliance under a written timeline set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*; and appears to demonstrate capacity to sustain itself in the long term.

Probation

NWCCU may place an institution on probation and note its accreditation is in jeopardy when it does not appear to be in compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations, and there is evidence non-compliance is sufficiently

serious, extensive, or substantial, that it raises concern about: quality of student learning experience; capacity to make appropriate improvements within a short period of time; capacity to sustain itself in the long term such that a teach-out plan is required; or information collected through monitoring activities suggests there are serious concerns related to student achievement, viability and capacity, or financial health.

Procedures Related to Warning and Probation Actions

The non-compliance period is determined under a written timeline set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR §602.20(a)(2)*. NWCCU retains authority to take any action during this period of time because a sequence of action is not required. An institution placed on warning or probation will prepare a monitoring report(s) on a schedule set by NWCCU based on the nature and complexity of the area(s) of non-compliance, and the stated mission and educational objectives of the institution in accordance with *34 CFR 602.20(a)(2)*. The monitoring report must provide evidence demonstrating the institution appears to be in compliance with identified Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations. A follow-up evaluation team visit will occur after submission of the monitoring report. NWCCU will request a teach-out plan and possibly teach-out agreement(s) in accordance with the [Policy on Procedures to Close a Program, Branch Campus or Institution](#). An action to continue probation or warning will specify areas of non-compliance that have been remedied, continued areas of non-compliance, and any new areas of non-compliance. If new areas of non-compliance are identified, NWCCU will require a further monitoring report and will direct a follow-up evaluation team visit. Review of the report(s) and visit(s) must be completed and accreditation reaffirmed in accordance with the schedule set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR 602.20(a)(2)*. NWCCU will reaffirm accreditation after a non-compliance action only when the institution provides evidence that it is in compliance with all Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, and applicable federal regulations.

Show Cause

NWCCU may require an accredited or candidate institution to show cause and note its accreditation is in jeopardy, when it does not appear to be in compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations, and there is evidence the non-compliance is sufficiently egregious such that it raises concerns the institution: has not made sufficient progress toward achieving compliance; does not appear to demonstrate capacity to comply with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations under a timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*; is in imminent danger of closing; has demonstrated a lack of integrity, truthfulness, or responsibility, and the Commission determines students may be harmed; or information from monitoring activities suggests serious concerns related to student achievement, viability and capacity, or financial health.

Procedures Related to Show Cause Action

A show cause action requires the institution to present evidence why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. A show cause action will identify Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or federal regulations that must be addressed in a show cause report, the due date, and require a show cause visit. For accreditation to be reaffirmed, the show

cause report must provide evidence the institution made all necessary improvements and meets the Standards for Accreditation, Policies, and applicable federal regulations. An on-site show cause visit will follow submission of the show cause report to verify the information submitted. The show cause action will require a teach-out plan and, if applicable, teach-out agreement(s). The institution may be required to appear before the Commission to consider the status of its accreditation.

Extension for Good Cause

NWCCU may continue an institution's noncompliance status and extend for good cause beyond the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.18(d) and § 602.20(a)(2)*. A decision to grant an extension for good cause is done only under exceptional circumstances, is not a right, is made at the discretion of the Commission, and is not subject to appeal. An extension is not available to candidate institutions. The Commission may continue an accredited institution's warning, probation, or show cause status for good cause beyond the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(3)*. NWCCU will set the length of the extension not to exceed one year.

NWCCU will consider compelling evidence of one or more of the following when making a decision to grant an extension for good cause: student learning experience is not compromised; institution has complied with Commission Policies; an implementable teach-out plan with signed teach-out agreements, if requested by the Commission; demonstrated improvement and potential to remedy non-compliance issues within period of extension; reasonable plan to meet reaffirmation within period of extension; support from an entity that will contribute to compliance; accurate, fair, and complete information on all operations in response to Commission requests; compliance with state and federal requirements; good standing with other accreditors; and impacts of a natural disaster, catastrophe, or other circumstance outside of the institution's control.

NWCCU will reaffirm accreditation at the conclusion of the extension, take adverse action, or consider a final, second extension for good cause not to exceed one year. In considering whether to grant a final extension for good cause, the Commission will consider compelling evidence: of further progress in implementing changes toward compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations; that institution will come into compliance during extended timeframe; or since first extension, institution made progress to stabilize its financial condition, enrollments, or sufficient levels of qualified staffing.

The institution remains accredited during an extension for good cause. The rationale for granting or denying an extension for good cause will appear in the Commission action. NWCCU's action to deny an extension for good cause is not an adverse action subject to appeal. NWCCU will act to reaffirm or withdraw accreditation at the conclusion of the final extension.

Adverse Action

NWCCU will take an adverse action when an institution has not demonstrated compliance, has had the opportunity to show cause, and/or the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)* for non-compliance plus good cause extension, if any, has expired. An institution has the right to appeal an adverse action [Appeals Procedure Policy](#). The institution

also has the right to arbitrate a final decision of the Appeal Board. [Arbitration Policy](#). The institution retains its candidate or accredited status until the effective date of withdrawal or completion of the appeal process, and arbitration, whichever is later. Membership in NWCCU ceases when withdrawal of candidate status or accreditation is effective.

NWCCU may deny Candidate for Accreditation Status if institution does not demonstrate compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations within the five-year period of candidacy under *34 CFR § 602.16(a)(2)(ii)*, and must wait two years to reapply.

NWCCU may Withdraw Candidate for Accreditation Status if it determines the institution no longer appears to demonstrate compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations within the five-year period of candidacy under *34 CFR § 602.16(a)(2)*.

NWCCU may Deny Accreditation if the candidate institution fails to demonstrate compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations within five-year period of candidacy established under *34 CFR § 602.16(a)(2)*. If the institution is denied accreditation, NWCCU will maintain the institution's Candidate for Accreditation status for currently enrolled students until the institution has had a reasonable time to complete its teach-out plan to assist students but for no more than 120 days, unless approved by NWCCU for good cause under *34 CFR § 602.23(f)(1)(iii)*.

NWCCU may Withdraw Accreditation if it determines institution no longer meets Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations, fails to show cause why its accreditation status should not be withdrawn, and institution has failed to demonstrate: it can provide a quality student learning experience; it has the capacity to make required improvements; it can sustain itself; or it can come into compliance within the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*.

Prior to an adverse action, NWCCU will require the institution to show cause. If the institution chooses not to prepare a show cause report and hold a show cause visit, or does not comply with requests for a written report, teach-out plan, or other information, NWCCU may take an immediate adverse action under *34 CFR § 602.20(b)*.

When an adverse action becomes final, NWCCU shall set the effective date for the termination of accreditation and thereafter membership ceases.

Substantive Change Action

NWCCU will act on requests for substantive change under its [Substantive Change Policy](#).

Procedural Actions

NWCCU may take other actions related to the accreditation process and may alter the timing or schedule of an accreditation review cycle. NWCCU may defer a decision on any action when it determines additional information is needed and request a supplemental report, with or without a follow-up team visit. A decision may be deferred only if it will be made within

established timeframes under *34 CFR §602.16(a)(2)* for candidate institutions, under *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)* for accredited institutions, or Commission Policies.

If the institution demonstrates extraordinary circumstances, NWCCU may delay the due date of accreditation activity within the accreditation review cycle and continue accreditation. Extraordinary circumstances include situations beyond the institution's control or any situation which may put Commission representatives at risk such as natural disaster, pandemic, catastrophic event, or political unrest. The action will specify the revised due date, not to exceed one year. If it is still not possible to conduct an appropriate review at the conclusion of the one-year delay, the Commission may grant another one-year delay if the risk or extraordinary circumstances persist.

NWCCU may, in extraordinary circumstances, waive a specific requirement in its Policy. The Commission may include innovative program delivery approaches or offer an alternative means of satisfying NWCCU's requirements under *34 CFR § 602.18(c)(1-4)*. In such circumstances, the institution must demonstrate the need for such a waiver and ensure that students will receive equivalent benefit and not be harmed.

NWCCU will take action when institution requests to voluntarily surrender candidacy or accreditation. The institution must obtain NWCCU's approval and meet necessary conditions, including payment of outstanding dues and fees. The Commission may request a report addressing information needed to terminate membership including a teach-out plan.

Procedural actions are not appealable.

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