

ASPA-Member CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

(Adopted March 21, 1995)

An accrediting organization holding membership in the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA):

1. Pursues its mission, goals, and objectives, and conducts its operations in a trustworthy manner.

- Focuses primarily on educational quality, not narrow interests, or political action, or educational fashions.
- Demonstrates respect for the complex interrelationships involved in the pursuit of excellence by individual institutions or programs.
- Exhibits a system of checks and balances in its standards development and accreditation procedures.
- Maintains functional and operational autonomy.
- Avoids relationships and practices that would provoke questions about its overall objectivity and integrity.
- Analyzes criticism carefully and responds appropriately by explaining its policies and actions and/or making changes.

2. Maximizes service, productivity, and effectiveness in the accreditation relationship.

- Recognizes that teaching and learning, not accredited status, are the primary purposes of institutions and programs.
- Respects the expertise and aspirations for high achievement already present and functioning in institutions and programs.
- Uses its understanding of the teaching and learning focus and the presence of local expertise and aspirations as a basis for serving effectively at individual institutions and programs.
- Keeps the accreditation process as efficient and cost-effective as possible by minimizing the use of visits and reports, and by eliminating, wherever possible, duplication of effort between accreditation and other review processes.
- Works cooperatively with other accrediting bodies to avoid conflicting standards, and to minimize duplication of effort in the preparation of accreditation materials and the conduct of on-site visits.
- Provides the institution or programs with a thoughtful diagnostic analysis that assists the institution or program in finding its own approaches and solutions, and that makes a clear distinction between what is required for accreditation and what is recommended for improvement of the institution or program.

3. Respects and protects institutional autonomy.

- Works with issues of institutional autonomy in light of the commitment to mutual accountability implied by participation in accreditation, while at the same time, respecting the diversity of effective institutional and programmatic approaches to common goals, issues, challenges, and opportunities.
- Applies its standards and procedures with profound respect for the rights and responsibilities of institutions and programs to identify, designate, and control (a) their respective missions, goals, and objectives; (b) educational and philosophical principles and methodologies used to pursue functions implicit in their various missions, goals, and objectives; (c) specific choices and approaches to content; (d) agendas and areas of study pursued through scholarship, research, and policy developments; (e) specific personnel choices, staffing configurations, administrative structures, and other operational decisions; and (f) content, methodologies, and timing of tests, evaluations, and assessments.
- With respect to professional schools and programs, recognizes the ultimate authority of each academic community for its own educational policies while maintaining fundamental standards and fostering consideration of evolving needs and conditions in the profession and the communities it serves.

4. Maintains a broad perspective as the basis for wise decision making.

- Gathers and analyzes information and ideas from multiple sources and viewpoints concerning issues important to institutions, programs, professions, publics, governments, and others concerned with the content, scope, and effectiveness of its work.
- Uses the results of these analyses in formulating policies and procedures that promote substantive, effective teaching and learning, that protect the autonomy of institutions and programs, and that encourage trust and cooperation within and among various components of the larger higher education community.

5. Focuses accreditation reviews on the development of knowledge and competence.

- Concentrates on results in light of specific institutional and programmatic missions, goals, objectives, and contexts.
- Deals comprehensively with relationships and interdependencies among purposes, aspirations, curricula, operations, resources, and results.
- Considers techniques, methods, and resources primarily in light of results achieved and functions fulfilled rather than the reverse.
- Has standards and review procedures that provide room for experimentation, encourage responsible innovation, and promote thoughtful evolution.

6. Exhibits integrity and professionalism in the conduct of its operations.

- Creates and documents its scope of authority, policies, and procedures to ensure governance and decision making under a framework of “laws not persons.”
- Exercises professional judgment in the context of its published standards and procedures.
- Demonstrates continuing care with policies, procedures, and operations regarding due process, conflict of interest, confidentiality, and consistent application of standards.
- Presents its materials and conducts its business with accuracy, skill, and sophistication sufficient to produce credibility for its role as an evaluator of educational quality.
- Is quick to admit errors in any part of the evaluation process, and equally quick to rectify such errors.
- Maintains sufficient financial, personnel, and other resources to carry out its operations effectively.
- Provides accurate, clear, and timely information to the higher education community, to the professions, and to the public concerning standards and procedures for accreditation, and the status of accredited institutions and programs.
- Corrects inaccurate information about itself or its actions.

7. Has mechanisms to ensure that expertise and experience in the application of its standards, procedures, and values are present in members of its visiting teams, commissions, and staff.

- Maintains a thorough and effective orientation, training, and professional development program for all accreditation personnel.
- Works with institutions and programs to ensure that site teams represent a collection of expertise and experience appropriate for each specific review.
- Conducts evaluations of personnel that involve responses from institutions and programs that have experienced the accreditation process.
- Conducts evaluations of criteria and procedures that include responses from reviewers and those reviewed.

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