



September 15, 2022

Updated ACCET Guidance – COVID-19 Temporary Flexibilities

The Accrediting Commission of the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET) recently reviewed the continuing challenges of COVID-19 and revised the guidance following the December 2020, April 2021, and August 2021 Commission meetings.

Upon additional consideration of the emerging challenges and significant impact of COVID-19, the Accrediting Commission voted to keep the temporary flexibilities in place until they are affirmatively rescinded but no later than 180 days following the date on which the COVID-19 national emergency declaration is rescinded. In extending these temporary flexibilities, ACCET follows the guidance of the U.S. Department of Education and the Student Exchange Visitors Program (SEVP), including the period for temporary flexibilities due to COVID-19.

Temporary Flexibilities: ACCET guidance provides certain flexibilities for institutions that are working to help students complete the term in which they are currently enrolled and identifies options available to institutions so that they can continue to serve current students during the COVID-19 emergency, including:

- Temporary closure.
- Temporary distance learning (IDL) delivery.
- Change in student enrollment status (e.g., full-time to part-time status) (This option is not available to IEPs).
- Consortium agreements (This option is not available to IEPs).
- Temporary change of location (This option is only available to IEPs)

Externships: Institutions will be permitted the temporary flexibility of offering students whose scheduled internship/externship is disrupted due to the COVID-19 emergency their (each student's) choice to either:

1. Complete a rescheduled externship/internship, which may require the student to take a leave of absence; or
2. Complete, in lieu of internship/externship, a capstone course comparable in length (clock hours or credit hours) to the internship/externship, unless prohibited by any applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

Labs: Institutions will be permitted the temporary flexibility of offering students whose scheduled labs are disrupted due to the COVID-19 emergency their (each student's) choice to complete one of the three:

1. Rescheduled labs, which may require students to take a leave of absence.
2. Simulated labs that: (a) provide synchronous (real-time) sharing of hands-on practice using video conferencing, and (b) assess students' skills based on observed levels of performance during lab time. Note that this option is not permissible if prohibited by any

applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

3. Didactic classes comparable in length (clock hours or credit hours) to the labs missed due to COVID-19 on the condition that the institutions schedule make-up labs in the future to provide students the opportunity to subsequently complete labs necessary for students to develop and practice their hands-on skills. Note that this option is not permissible if prohibited by any applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

Verification of High School (or Equivalent) Completion Status: Where an institution is unable to obtain documentation of an applicant's high school completion or equivalency, an institution will be permitted the temporary flexibility to accept a signed and dated attestation from an applicant attesting to his or her high school completion and approximate date of completion in lieu of the applicant's official high school diploma, official transcript, or high school equivalency certificate during the COVID-19 emergency period. Note that this temporary flexibility is not permissible if prohibited by any applicable state and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

Leaves of Absence (LOA): Institutions will be permitted the following temporary flexibilities relative to leaves of absence, including:

1. Waiving the requirement that: (a) the institution must approve a written and signed leave of absence request by the students prior to the leave of absence and (b) the student returning from a leave of absence (LOA) must resume at the same point in his/her program that the student began the LOA.
2. Establishing, even on a temporary basis, a formal written leave of absence policy consistent with any state, federal, and accreditation requirements if the institution previously did not have a formal written policy.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP): Institutions will be permitted the following temporary flexibilities relative to satisfactory academic progress (SAP):

1. An institution may exclude from the quantitative component (pace measurement) of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) attempted credits/hours a student was unable to complete as a result of the COVID-19 national emergency.
2. It is not necessary for a student to have filed an SAP appeal for an institution to exercise the flexibility identified in item #1. However, to exclude attempted credits/hours from SAP, an institution must have reasonably determined that the student's failure to complete those credits/hours was the result of a COVID-19-related circumstance. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to, (a) illness of the student or family member, (b) need to become a caregiver or first responder, (c) economic hardship, (d) added work hours, (e) loss of childcare, (f) inability to continue with classes via distance education, (g) inability to access wi-fi due to closed facilities. If an institution temporarily ceases operations during a period of enrollment, attempted credits for all affected students (specific to that enrollment period) may be excluded.

Completion and Placement Statistics (Revised):

1. During the COVID-19 emergency, institutions have continued reporting annual completion and placement data while documenting their completion and placement processes and providing student services consistent with policies and procedures of ACCET, the institution, and any pertinent regulatory bodies.

2. Beginning with the December 2022 accreditation cycle, institutions will be reviewed for partial year 2022 outcomes in the normal course. On-site evaluation teams will cite weaknesses for completion and/or placement rates below ACCET benchmarks for partial year 2022. Additionally, the Accrediting Commission may issue programmatic probation directives for programs reporting below benchmark for calendar year 2021 and partial year 2022, per ACCET Document 28.

Completion Flexibility: For Calendar Years 2020, 2021, and 2022, the Commission will consider completion waivers for students who are unable to complete their program due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Illness of the student or family member,
- Need to become a caregiver or first responder,
- Economic hardship,
- Added work hours,
- Homeschooling or child/dependent care issues, or
- Inability to continue with classes via distance education, and
- Inability to access Wi-Fi due to closed facilities.

COVID-19 waivers must be documented, including the student's signature, date, and notification of a specific reason. Waivers that bring the percentage above 10% will result in adjusted waiver and completion rates and will be reviewed by the Commission.

Placement Flexibility: For Calendar Years 2020, 2021, and 2022, the Commission will consider placement waivers for students who are waiving placement assistance due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Illness of the student or family member,
- Need to become a caregiver or first responder,
- Economic hardship,
- Added work hours,
- Homeschooling or child/dependent care issues, or
- Inability to continue with classes via distance education, and
- Inability to access Wi-Fi due to closed facilities.

COVID-19 Waivers must be documented, including the student's signature, date, and notification of a specific reason. Waivers that bring the percentage above 15% will result in adjusted waiver and completion rates and will be reviewed by the Commission.