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5. Accreditation Process

Accreditation by CEA provides a structure through which programs and institutions can take steps to improve and evaluate their programs and institutions. CEA accreditation consists of several phases. First, programs or institutions must submit an eligibility application form. If they are deemed eligible to seek accreditation, they must send a representative to an accreditation workshop, develop a plan for the self-study process, conduct a self-study, and undergo a site visit by trained peer reviewers. The last step in the process is the Commission's review and accreditation decision. These phases are described below.

5.1. Eligibility

CEA will accept applications only from programs and institutions that fall within the Commission's scope of accreditation. In the United States, this includes English language programs in institutions accredited by an agency recognized by the Secretary of the U. S. Department of Education, English programs within an agency of the U.S. government, and independent English language institutions with an English language program. CEA also accredits English language programs offered outside the United States.

5.1.1. General eligibility requirements

a. All applicants, both within and outside of the United States, must document that

i. the program or language institution offers an educational program for at least three months of the year and the educational program is regularly offered;

ii. the educational program has a curriculum designed to serve the needs of postsecondary students who are nonnative speakers of English;

iii. the curriculum allows for the differentiation of participants by level of English language proficiency;

iv. instruction has been offered for at least one year.

b. If the English language program is configured as an intensive English program (IEP) within an accredited university or college within the United States, it must offer

i. at least 18 hours of language instruction per week to meet the needs of F-1 visa holders, or

ii. at least 12 credit hours of language instruction per term to meet the needs of F-1 visa holders.

c. If the English language program is configured as an intensive English program (IEP) provided by an independent language school within the United States, it must offer at least 18 hours a week of language instruction per week to meet the needs of F-1 visa holders.

d. Independent language institutions within the United States must document that all educational programs offered by the institution as legally constituted are within CEA's scope of English and foreign language teaching and learning related programs.

e. A program or institution within the United States that offers a non-intensive English language program of fewer than 18 hours a week may be deemed eligible provided

   i. it meets other eligibility requirements, and

   ii. the authorizing administrator acknowledges that CEA accreditation of the non-intensive program does not meet the requirements of the Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act ("the Accreditation Act") and does not meet certification requirements for the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) petition to enroll non-immigrant students.

To show that it meets CEA's eligibility requirements, a program or institution submits an application for eligibility and an application fee. The application for eligibility, along with verifying documents submitted by the program's or language institution's chief operating officer or authorized individual, provides evidence that the applicant meets the general eligibility requirements and is within the scope of CEA accreditation. In addition, applicants must submit sufficient information about the program or language institution's curriculum, faculty, facilities, administration, and student services in order to show that it can be reviewed on the basis of the *CEA Standards.*

5.1.2. Additional eligibility application requirements

Additional specific eligibility application requirements apply in certain situations. In some cases, the eligibility application form will specify required submission of additional materials.

a. A program in a university or college that applies for *programmatic* accreditation must submit a copy of the host institution's letter of accreditation from a recognized regional or national accrediting agency.

b. A program in a university or college that offers an eligible English language program has the option to include in its application other regularly offered non-degree English language teaching and learning programs or courses within the unit that delivers the eligible English language program.

c. An independent language institution must submit a copy of its authority to offer postsecondary education in the state, if required.

d. If a language institution offers TESL/TEFL teacher training courses or programs, foreign language courses or programs, or other educational programs that will be included in the accreditation review, it must submit additional materials as required on the eligibility application form.

e. An English language program that exists as part of an agency of the U.S. government must include an explanation of the program's relationship to that agency.

Upon review of required documentation submitted with the eligibility application, CEA may request additional information before determining that an applicant is eligible to begin the accreditation process. CEA may also inform the eligible site of specific standard areas where it may have difficulty coming into compliance with the *CEA Standards.* In such cases, CEA will require a formal written confirmation from the authorized administrator stating that the program or institution intends to go forward with the accreditation process despite the concerns expressed by CEA.

5.1.3. Eligibility requirements for applicants following adverse actions by other agencies

If any of the following actions have been taken against either the institution in which a program resides or an independent institution seeking accreditation, the applicant must provide additional documentation along with its eligibility application. Failure to report such actions may result in denial of eligibility:

a. a pending or final action brought by a state or federal agency for non-compliance with the law
b. a pending or final action brought by a state agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the state
c. a pending or final decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or reaccreditation; suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s accreditation or reaccreditation; or to impose probation or an equivalent status.

In each case, the applicant must provide CEA with the appropriate explanatory information and documentation, including but not limited to the following:

a. the name of the federal or state agency, the accrediting body, or licensing authority
b. the type of action, the date of the action, and its underlying reasons, including copies of any official documents related to any such actions;
c. the anticipated or actual date of any final decisions related to the adverse action.

If the application is submitted less than one year after such action, CEA will investigate the conditions, including contacting the federal, state, or accrediting agency for further information. All information will be reviewed by the Executive Committee, which may take one of two actions:

1. Conclude, following review of the documentation, that the adverse action in question does not affect the eligibility of the applicant, in which case the investigation is complete.
2. Ask for additional information to be received within 15 working days.

Based on its investigation, CEA may approve or deny eligibility. If approved, CEA will provide the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, within 30 days of the approval, a thorough and reasonable explanation of why the action of the other accrediting agency or state or federal agency does not preclude the program or institution from being deemed eligible to begin the CEA accreditation process. If denied CEA eligibility, the program or institution may not again apply for eligibility for CEA accreditation for a period of one year following the final adverse action by the other agency.

5.1.4. Approval of eligibility

a. A program or institution that meets all eligibility requirements will receive a determination of eligibility letter. The letter states that the program or institution has been deemed eligible to seek accreditation, and states that it has one year to attend an accreditation workshop and start the accreditation process.

b. Approval of eligibility is not a preaccreditation status. A program or institution that has been deemed eligible is not permitted to publicly announce or promote its applicant status. Announcement of accreditation and use of the CEA logo is reserved for exclusive use of accredited programs and institutions.

c. A program or institution that does not meet the eligibility criteria will receive written notice. Except in cases involving adverse action by another agency, a program or institution that is initially denied eligibility to proceed may reapply if changes are made so that the site subsequently meets the requirements. In such a case, the program or institution must submit a new application for eligibility, as well as required documents and fees.

5.2. Accreditation workshop

Once eligibility has been approved, CEA requires programs and institutions to send at least one representative to an accreditation workshop. Sending a representative to the workshop implies that the program or institution is ready to begin the process of self-study.

CEA regularly offers accreditation workshops throughout the year, and for an additional fee, offers customized accreditation workshops upon request.

Workshops include general information about CEA policies and procedures, a review of the standards, requirements for writing the plan for the self-study, instructions for the self-study process, and requirements for submitting the self-study report. It is expected that the person chosen to be the self-study coordinator will attend the workshop. The representative(s) must register and pay the required workshop fee.

5.3. Plan for the self-study

Following the workshop, the site undergoing initial accreditation must submit a plan for the self-study, which is a document that guides the self-study process and confirms that the site intends to proceed with the self-study process.

A template for the plan for the self-study is distributed at the workshop. A fee is due at the time the plan is submitted. The fee covers staff review of the plan, staff guidance throughout the period of the self-study, and review of the self-study report when it is submitted. The plan template requires

a. a brief statement about the program or institution, its mission, and organization

b. the name of the person who will serve as the self-study coordinator and who will perform the following functions: act as contact person for CEA, coordinate activities of the various

committees, assist in the preparations for the site visit, and coordinate the writing of the final self-study report

c. a chronology of activities for undertaking the self-study
d. a list of roles and members of self-study committee(s)
e. a timeline for carrying out the self-study and a proposed target date for the site visit
f. affirmation that adequate resources are available to carry out the self-study

CEA staff reviews the plan to determine whether it meets the requirements listed above. The plan is due within two months following the accreditation workshop. After CEA receives, reviews, and approves the plan for the self-study, the electronic template(s) for the self-study will be sent to the self-study coordinator.

An extension for submission of the plan may be granted upon consultation with CEA staff. However, if the plan is not received within six months of attendance at the workshop, the program or institution will be removed from active status, and may be required to reapply for eligibility and register and pay for an additional workshop.

5.4. Reporting by in-process sites

Programs and institutions that have been deemed eligible are considered to be in process. An in-process site must promptly report the following events to CEA:

a. change of primary contact
b. change of program or institution name
c. change of location
d. change of control, if a program, or change of ownership, if an institution
e. closure of the site
f. addition or closure of an auxiliary location
g. elimination of an educational offering cited in the eligibility determination
h. any pending or final adverse action against the site by other accrediting agencies, or federal or state agencies. An in-process program must notify CEA of any such pending or final actions against the institution in which it resides.
i. any change that may affect the site's compliance with CEA's eligibility requirements

CEA will review the eligibility determination in light of the reported changes and inform the site of necessary actions to maintain eligibility, if any. CEA may withdraw the eligibility of a site or take other action based on the required reporting if compliance with CEA's policies, including eligibility requirements, is affected by the notification. Reports of adverse actions will be investigated following the process described in Section 5.1.3. Eligibility requirements for applicants following adverse actions by other agencies.

5.5. Self-study report

The *CEA Accreditation Handbook* outlines the procedures and format for submitting the self-study report.

The self-study report must be completed during the 12 -16 month period following the accreditation workshop to which the site initially sent a representative and submitted in accordance with CEA's Timeline for Scheduling Site Visits and Reviews.

A program or institution undergoing initial accreditation that cannot complete the self-study within 16 months of attending a workshop may request an extension of up to eight months. CEA has the right to grant or deny the request, based on communications with the self-study coordinator and the rationale for requesting an extension. Programs and institutions that are denied an extension or that fail to meet the extended submission date are removed from the CEA accreditation process and must begin the process anew.

Upon receipt of the self-study report, CEA staff reviews the report for completeness and correct formatting. If the self-study is incomplete, incorrectly formatted, or information in the report is considered to be insufficient for scheduling a site visit, the site will be required to make necessary revisions. The site may be moved to the next review cycle and a new submission date for the self-study will be established. In cases where the self- study report is complete and correctly formatted and the staff has determined that the report contains sufficient information to carry out a site visit, staff will begin the process of scheduling a visit.

5.6. Site review process

5.6.1. Site reviewers

The role of site reviewers is to verify information in the self-study report and evaluate whether the program or institution appears to meet the *CEA Standards*. The Commission uses the review team's report in making the accreditation decision. Reviewers are selected and trained based on the policies and procedures outlined in Section 17: Site Reviewers.

Evaluation is a sensitive task, requiring impartial review of a program or institution. At the time of their initial selection, all site reviewers sign a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement. They must bring to the attention of CEA any factor that might suggest any conflict of interest with regard to their evaluation of a particular program or institution.

To this end, CEA makes a good-faith effort to select potential reviewers from the pool in a manner such that no potential member

a. is a graduate of the program, its host institution, or the independent English language institution,
b. is or has been an employee or has close relatives in the same system,
c. has a close personal or professional relationship with site personnel, or
d. currently resides in the same immediate geographic area of the site under review.

CEA will not assign any reviewer who has expressed public opinions about the site's quality, integrity, or suitability to be accredited nor any reviewer who has or had a financial interest in or been a consultant to the program or the institution.

CEA will assign review team members to ensure that teams for programmatic reviews include educators and practitioners and that teams for institutional reviews include academics and administrators, as required by USDE regulations.

5.6.2. Site visit

CEA schedules site visits according to an established accreditation review cycle. The site visit must occur at a time when classes are in session, faculty are teaching, administrators and staff are available, and operations are functioning normally. CEA will make every effort to meet a site's request for a visit within the requested timeline but reserves the right to move the site to another review cycle based on availability of reviewers and CEA site visit representatives. CEA will assign a team leader and at least one additional reviewer for each site visit. The site may challenge the appointment of team members one time if there are perceived conflicts of interest or other substantive concerns. To challenge the appointments, the site must provide evidence of the conflict or concerns. A CEA staff representative accompanies the team on visits to ensure consistency of procedures and reliable application of standards. The CEA site visit representative is available to the Commission when it deliberates on accreditation decisions in order to answer specific questions that might arise.

The review team and the site follow detailed procedures as provided in workshop manuals and stated in visit preparation materials. On site, members of the team review any materials additional to the submitted self-study report and meet with the chief operating officer(s), administrators, staff, faculty, and students to evaluate the effectiveness of the program or institution. The reviewers develop an understanding of the extent to which the site meets its stated objectives and whether it appears to meet the *CEA Standards*.

Throughout the visit, reviewers discuss whether the site appears to meet each individual standard. Before the exit meeting, during which they meet with the chief operating officer(s) or administrators and the self-study team, reviewers establish their final findings on each standard. At the exit meeting, the review team leader indicates the strengths of the program or institution and mentions any general areas of weakness that will be cited in the team's report.

5.6.3. Review evaluation

The self-study and site visit processes are evaluated by each site. The self-study coordinator is asked to evaluate CEA's procedures related to the self-study, the *CEA Standards*, the review process, and the work of the reviewers and CEA site visit representative. Any complaints about policies and/or procedures related to the review will be referred to the Commission for discussion.

Similarly, the team leader evaluates the reviewer(s) and the review process, and the reviewers evaluate the team leader and the review process. Evaluation by the site and review teams is

critical to ensure the quality and reliability of the review process and determine the effectiveness of members of the reviewer pool.

5.6.4. Review team report

The review team conveys its findings to the site and the Commission in a review team report. The report represents the team's best professional judgment as to whether the site appears to meet the *CEA Standards*. The report includes a team summary which provides a broad look at the results, summarizing strengths and weaknesses; a list of activities conducted on site, including interviews, observations and other verification activities; and team findings for each standard. The reviewers' findings for each standard include the reviewers' rationale for the final finding that each standard appears to be met, appears to be partially met, or does not appear to be met. The CEA site visit representative supports the team in completing its report. Both reviewers are responsible for ensuring the review team report accurately reflects their findings.

5.6.5. Financial review report

Site reviewers do not view or verify a site's financial reporting. CEA staff conduct review of the site's responses to the financial standards and related financial reports. CEA's financial manager conducts verifications of financial matters and prepares a report reflecting findings.

5.6.6. Site response to the review team report

The review team report and the financial review report are sent to the site no later than 30 working days after the visit. Upon receiving the review team report and the post-visit financial review documents, the program or institution must respond to the reports in writing no later than 30 working days after receiving them. The response must have three sections:

a. a short response to the report as a whole
b. correction of factual errors, if any, and
c. a response to any standard marked as "appears to partially meet" or "appears not to meet."

A site may correct errors or provide additional documentation not accessed by the review team during the site visit or provide information about its plans (with documentation) to bring its policies, practices, and procedures into compliance with the *CEA Standards*.

5.7. The accreditation decision

The process concludes with a Commission review and decision at the Commission meeting designated in the site's plan. In making an accreditation decision, the Commission will review the site's self-study report and the review team report, and will take into consideration the site's response to the review team report. Accreditation decisions are outlined in Section 7: The Accreditation Decision.

5.8. Reaccreditation

At least two years before the end of the site's accreditation period, CEA will notify an accredited site that it must begin the reaccreditation process.

5.8.1. Steps in the reaccreditation process

The reaccreditation process requires the accredited site to complete the following steps:

1. Submit a reaccreditation application at least one year prior to expiration of the current grant of accreditation. At this time, eligibility will be reaffirmed.
2. Send a representative to an accreditation workshop.
3. Following the workshop, submit a timeline for completing the self-study report, undergoing the reaccreditation visit, and coming before the Commission for a reaccreditation decision no later than the end of the grant of accreditation.

   A fee is due which covers staff review of the timeline, staff guidance throughout the period of the self-study, and review of the self-study report when it is submitted.
4. Submit a self-study report responding to *CEA Standards* in place at the time the site attends the accreditation workshop.
5. Undergo a site visit.
6. Respond to the site visit report by the stated deadline.

5.8.2. Expiration of the period of accreditation

If an accredited program or institution does not apply for reaccreditation, accredited status expires at the time the current grant of accreditation expires, provided all fees are paid and the site is in good standing.

5.8.3. Extension of status by one cycle

In cases where the reaccreditation timeline cannot be met due to CEA's scheduling constraints or unexpected circumstances at the site, the CEA executive director may approve the extension of the site's accredited status for one cycle, that is, until the next Commission meeting at which the site can be reviewed. If the site subsequently withdraws from accreditation, the extension will be nullified and the expiration of the site's accreditation will revert to the original date.

5.8.4. Early Commission decision

In cases where the site comes before the Commission for a reaccreditation decision one cycle or more before the end of the previous grant of accreditation, the end date of the previous grant of accreditation is rescinded and replaced with the date the Commission makes the reaccreditation decision.

a. If reaccreditation is granted, the period of reaccreditation commences on the date the Commission makes the reaccreditation decision.

b. If reaccreditation is denied, the denial decision is effective on the date the Commission makes the decision; appeal and other processes available to the site following a denial conform to CEA's denial policies.