



# Information for Programs Seeking Initial Accreditation

Answers to Frequently-  
Asked-Questions

(from [www.abet.org/new\\_program.shtml](http://www.abet.org/new_program.shtml))



*Leadership and Quality Assurance  
in Applied Science, Computing,  
Engineering, and Technology Education*

## Welcome new programs and programs new to ABET accreditation.

We hope the following information  
is helpful as you begin the process  
of accrediting your program.

ABET welcomes programs seeking initial accreditation, and this document is intended to answer many of the questions that individuals involved with programs seeking initial accreditation ask. There are many steps that, if taken early, can make the accreditation process an easier, less mysterious, and much more positive experience for the program.

### About ABET

ABET accredits academic programs at universities and colleges preparing graduates for entry into professional disciplines of applied science, computing, engineering, and technology.

Founded in 1932, ABET is a specialized accreditation agency that accredits post-secondary degree-granting programs. Note that ABET accredits programs at various levels; ABET does not accredit departments, colleges, or institutions. ABET is a private, non-profit organization comprised of 29 professional societies spanning the professional disciplines listed above. ABET accreditation is conducted by four accreditation commissions at the degree levels indicated:

- **Applied Science Accreditation Commission (ASAC)**  
Accredits programs at the associate's, baccalaureate, and/or master's levels.
- **Computing Accreditation Commission (CAC)**  
Accredits programs at the baccalaureate level.
- **Engineering Accreditation Commission (EAC)**  
Accredits programs at the baccalaureate and/or master's levels.
- **Technology Accreditation Commission (TAC)**  
Accredits programs at the associate's and/or baccalaureate levels.

ABET currently accredits approximately 2,800 programs at more than 600 colleges and universities located or chartered within the U.S. In November 2006, the ABET Board of Directors directed the ABET accreditation commissions to accredit programs outside of the U.S. Initially, programs having current ABET substantial equivalency status will be given priority when applying for accreditation. Some initial evaluations may be deferred for one or more years if the demand for evaluations exceeds ABET's resources.

### Institutional Eligibility

The first step in attaining ABET accreditation is to establish the eligibility of the institution. In the United States, this eligibility is generally satisfied if the institution is accredited by a regional accreditation agency. For institutions outside of the U.S., establishing eligibility begins with the institution's completion of a Request for Approval (RFA). The RFA is completed by each appropriate accreditation agency in the institution's country and submitted to ABET by the institution by January 31.

In addition, programs requesting initial evaluation must have graduates prior to or during the academic year of scheduled accreditation visits.

### Language

ABET accreditation will be offered only to programs that conduct a substantial fraction of the students' activities in English



and that are able to prepare for and receive a visiting team conducting its evaluation activity in English. The self-study report and other documents provided to the evaluation team must be in English.

## Commission Designation

Each program seeking accreditation will be assigned to a specific commission or commissions based upon the “literal” name of the program, i.e., the program name shown on the graduating student’s transcript and in the institution’s literature. Although the selection of program names is the prerogative of the educational institution, the proliferation of program names is discouraged because different names for essentially the same program confuse and mislead the public, including students, prospective students, and employers. An institution may not use the same program name to identify both an ABET-accredited program and a program that is not ABET-accredited.

## Accreditation Criteria

There are two types of criteria:

- **General Criteria** apply to all programs accredited by an ABET accreditation commission.
- **Program Criteria** are additional criteria that apply to all programs having names that fall within the *applicability* section of the program criteria. Program criteria ensure that the program name accurately indicates the competencies of the program’s graduates.

## Program Names

Some program names imply a specialization within a broader disciplinary area, and program criteria have been developed for many such areas of specialization. If a program name implies a specialization (or multiple specializations) for which program criteria have been developed, the program must satisfy *all* applicable program criteria in addition to the general criteria. For example, a mechanical engineering program will need to satisfy the general criteria for engineering and the mechanical engineering program criteria.

Further, if a program name implies specializations that span disciplines accredited by more than one commission, the program must satisfy all applicable criteria for those commissions. For example, a computer science and engineering program must satisfy the Engineering Accreditation Commission’s general *and* program criteria as well as the Computing Accreditation Commission’s general *and* program criteria. A program seeking accreditation must provide the program name *in English* so that the applicable criteria may be determined.

## Helpful Documents

Early in the process, it is recommended that the following two documents be reviewed by the program’s administration and faculty members:

### 1) The applicable accreditation criteria:

- Criteria for Accrediting Applied Science Programs
- Criteria for Accrediting Computing Programs
- Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Programs
- Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Technology Programs

### 2) The Accreditation Policy and Procedure Manual

Both of these documents, along with other forms and information, are available at [www.abet.org/forms.shtml](http://www.abet.org/forms.shtml).

## Helpful Meetings, Workshops, and More

If your institution is considering accreditation, it would be useful for at least one individual associated with your program to attend one or more of the following meetings. There is a considerable degree of overlap among these meetings; therefore, it is generally not recommended that individuals attend all of these events.

### ■ The Commission Summit

This meeting is generally held on a Wednesday late in October in conjunction with the ABET Annual Meeting. It provides general information about the ABET accreditation process, as well as a chance to meet with accreditation commission leaders and discuss commission-specific considerations. The Annual Meeting follows with two days of topics and presenters of interest to those involved with the accreditation process and higher education in the disciplines that ABET accredits. More information about the Commission Summit is available at [www.abet.org/summit.shtml](http://www.abet.org/summit.shtml).

### ■ Institutional Representative’s Day

This meeting is generally held during the second half of July. It is specifically intended for institutional representa-



tives who have programs being visited during the following fall and provides an opportunity for the institutional representative to meet and converse with the assigned team chair. Nevertheless, this event is open to the public.

■ **Faculty Workshop on Assessing Program Outcomes**

This workshop helps faculty establish program educational objectives and program outcomes and provides participants with an opportunity to develop assessment skills and strengthen their understanding of continuous improvement. More details are available at [www.abet.org/workshop.shtml](http://www.abet.org/workshop.shtml).

■ **Institute for the Development of Excellence in Assessment Leadership (IDEAL)**

This 4½-day provides a professional development opportunity for those responsible for leading their faculty in the development and implementation of a program assessment plan to improve student learning and document program effectiveness. When participants leave IDEAL, they have completed an implementation plan they can use at their home institution. See [www.abet.org/ideal.shtml](http://www.abet.org/ideal.shtml) to apply for the next session of IDEAL.

■ **ABET Webinars**

ABET Webinars are interactive, Internet-based seminars that enable programs to educate a number of faculty members about assessment and accreditation processes without incurring travel expenses. Each Webinar registration includes one telephone connection at one location,

access to a master set of handouts, and the ability for an unlimited number of individuals at the same location to participate. Each webinar offers multiple opportunities to pose questions, and each registrant receives a CD recording of the session after the event. CD recordings of past Webinars on a variety of topics are also available. Visit [www.abet.org/webinar.shtml](http://www.abet.org/webinar.shtml) to learn more.

Information about ABET meetings and events is provided on the ABET website at [www.abet.org/events.shtml](http://www.abet.org/events.shtml).

## Consultants

ABET does not permit current members of its accreditation commissions or Board of Directors to consult on accreditation matters because of potential conflicts of interest. Nevertheless, the ABET Accreditation Director can suggest individuals who are knowledgeable about ABET accreditation criteria, policies, and procedures who can serve as consultants. The ensuing arrangements are between the institution and the consultant and do not involve ABET. Such arrangements reflect the experience of the consultant and do not necessarily reflect an official ABET position. Contact ABET at [accreditation@abet.org](mailto:accreditation@abet.org) for more information.

## Evaluations

ABET's policies require a comprehensive reevaluation of each accredited program at least every six years. These comprehensive evaluations are referred to as "general reviews." If the criteria are not fully satisfied, additional focused evaluations may be required between the six-year comprehensive evaluations. These focused evaluations may require either a report or a visit.

## Accreditation Costs

There are two types of costs associated with ABET accreditation, evaluation fees and maintenance fees. If a campus visit is required (which is always the case for an initial accreditation and for general reviews), the fee is based upon the team size. Generally, the minimum team size is three for a single program, i.e., one team chair and two program evaluators. For visits involving more than one program, the team size will typically be one team chair and one program evaluator for each program. There is also an annual maintenance fee covering the cost of maintaining the updated records of accreditation status. The current fee schedule is available at [www.abet.org/request.shtml](http://www.abet.org/request.shtml).

## The Typical Initial Accreditation Scenario

When a program thinks that it is ready to seek initial accreditation, the following steps should be taken:

- 1) A completed *Request for Evaluation* (RFE) form should be submitted along with one graduate's official original transcript from the most recent graduating class for each program requesting evaluation to ABET by January 31 of the year in which an evaluation is desired. Institutions outside of the U.S. are also required to provide a Request for Approval (RFA) completed by each appropriate recognition/accreditation agency no later than January 31. The RFE form and RFA form are available at [www.abet.org/request.shtml](http://www.abet.org/request.shtml).



- 2) The program should prepare a self-study report. This report should follow the format of the *Self-Study Questionnaire* for the appropriate accreditation commission(s). Questionnaires are available at [www.abet.org/forms.shtm](http://www.abet.org/forms.shtm)!. A copy of the self-study report must be provided to ABET by July 1, following submission of the RFE. The institution must also be prepared to provide copies of this report to the evaluation team members.
- 3) ABET will assign a team chair for the evaluation visit. This will typically occur in May. An institution must be willing to accept the assigned team chair. The only acceptable reason to reject a team chair is a documented perception of conflict of interest. The institution will be provided with the opportunity to reject the assigned team chair if a conflict of interest is perceived.
- 4) ABET expects prompt payment for all accreditation services. Visit fees are invoiced May 1 and must be paid within 90 days. Maintenance fees are invoiced October 1 and must be paid within 30 days. All payments are to be made in U.S. dollars. Non-payment of fees may result in cancellation of the visit, withholding of the Draft and/or Final Statements to the institution, and/or removal from the list of accredited programs.
- 5) The visit dates will be negotiated between the ABET team chair and the institution. The visit will generally occur in the September-through-December period while the program is in session.
- 6) Program evaluators are typically assigned by the end of July. The team chair will provide information about the assigned program evaluators to the institution. An institution must be willing to accept the assigned program evaluators. The only acceptable reason to reject a program evaluator is a documented perception of conflict of interest. The institution will be provided with the opportunity to reject an assigned program evaluator if a conflict of interest is perceived.
- 7) The evaluation team will usually arrive on campus on a Saturday or Sunday. The campus visit will normally be conducted on a Monday and Tuesday, concluding with an exit interview meeting with the institution's chief executive officer, dean, and other appropriate officials. The exit interview is intended to convey to the institution a summary of the results of the evaluation at that time.
- 8) After the visit, there will be a seven-day period during which the institution may respond to perceived errors of fact in the material that the team presented during the exit interview.
- 9) Following the seven-day period, the ABET team chair will prepare a Draft Statement to the institution. This Draft Statement will undergo an extensive editorial process and will be provided to the institution several months after the visit.
- 10) Upon receipt of the Draft Statement, the institution will have a 30-day period in which to respond to issues identified in the evaluation. This period is referred to as the *due process response period*.
- 11) Upon receipt of any due process response, a Final Statement to the institution will be prepared.
- 12) The Final Statement to the institution will be reviewed by the entire commission at its annual meeting in July following the visit. Any additional material related to issues identified in the evaluation and provided by the institution in enough time that it can be effectively reviewed by the commission will be considered.
- 13) The commission will determine the final accreditation action, which will be communicated to the institution by the end of August.



### **Retroactive Accreditation**

ABET accreditation can be granted only if at least one student has graduated from the designated program. Retroactive accreditation may be granted to cover students who graduated during the academic year prior to the evaluation visit. Typically, these are the students whose sample work and transcripts will have been evaluated. Thus, if a new program desires to have its first graduates covered by accreditation, the program's initial visit should be arranged for the fall immediately following the academic year in which the first students graduate.

### **Other Questions**

Please contact ABET at [accreditation@abet.org](mailto:accreditation@abet.org) with questions not addressed above.