

Applying the Criteria

- Harmonized Draft V.9.15.2024

Understanding & Applying Criteria

Criteria Application Basics

- ABET accredits **educational programs** leading to degrees. ABET does NOT accredit institutions, departments, or degrees.
- ABET defines an educational program as an integrated, organized experience that culminates in the awarding of a degree. The program will have program educational objectives, student outcomes, a curriculum, faculty, and facilities.
- ABET does not dictate program names to an institution.

You can find a thorough explanation of the above in the [Accreditation Policy and Procedure Manual, Section I.C.](#) Also, you will find the ABET Criteria for each commission on that page.

Understanding the Criteria

Evaluating a program's compliance begins with understanding the criteria. ABET Criteria are based on the principles of continuous quality improvement. General Criteria cover the following areas of an educational program:

- Students
- Program Educational Objectives
- Student Outcomes
- Continuous Improvement
- Curriculum
- Faculty
- Facilities
- Institutional Support

The following document discusses ABET rules and procedures.

- Accreditation Policy and Procedures (APPM)

Your member society may also have additional criteria that cover minimum standards for the specific program discipline you will be evaluating. These are called "Program Criteria."

Common Issues

Common Issues Associated with Each Criterion

The ABET Criteria are minimum standards that you apply with judgment. Over the years, ABET has identified common issues that may surface as you review a program's Self-Study Report and make observations during a visit for evidence of compliance.

The issues listed below for each criterion area are not exhaustive. You may identify additional issues as you review the Self-Study Report. Additionally, some issues listed here may not by themselves represent a shortcoming relative to the criteria, but rather may indicate a need to seek additional information to determine whether there is a shortcoming. Remember each shortcoming must refer to specific requirements in the criteria or APPM that are not fully met or potentially may not be met in the future.

Note: Your draft visit plan should detail with whom you will meet to resolve any issues with program compliance with criteria, which are not explained to your satisfaction in the Self-Study Report.

Criterion 1: Students

Overall View:

A Program Evaluator (PEV) should determine if the program is ensuring that it's following its own policies with respect to students, that their students receive proper guidance, and that their work complies with the program's curriculum no matter how the work was obtained, and any deviations documented. The PEV should ensure the students meet the graduation requirements.

Criterion 2: Program Educational Objectives

Overall View:

A PEV should determine if the program engages all constituents in creation and regular review of the program educational objectives. It is important that these objectives are broad statements that describe, to the public, what they can expect a program's graduates to be able to achieve within a few years of graduation. The program must provide evidence documenting the inclusion of all constituents in the periodic review of the PEOs.

Commission-Specific Items

- ETAC makes a distinction of key constituents vs all constituents.

Criterion 3: Student Outcomes

Student outcomes must include all aspects of prescribed Student Outcomes from the Commission criteria, must be measurable, and reflect what students should be able to know and do at graduation.

Commission-Specific Items

- CAC requires that the student outcomes are copied verbatim from the criteria.
- ANSAC & ETAC requires a process to periodically review and revise the student outcomes.

Criterion 4: Continuous Improvement

Overall View:

This is often the most challenging criterion with which the program must comply. The program

must provide evidence of assessment (data collection), evaluation (data analysis), and continuous improvement actions (decision making). There are three parts to this criterion, the first two are required and the third (other available information) is optional. A PEV needs to ensure that (1) the program determines the extent to which each student outcome is being attained and (2) those measurements are used as input for improvement actions. For the third aspect, often programs will take *ad hoc* judgments and make improvements; while acceptable, this is not a substitute for (1) and (2) above. All outcomes must be assessed, including student outcomes added by the program and specific program outcomes. The criteria do not require that students attain the outcomes—only that the extent of attainment is determined.

Assessment should not be limited to self-evaluation but should also include direct evaluation of student performance by others. Beware if the program uses course or overall project grades for measurement since grades usually represent an aggregate of performance on multiple outcomes. This approach usually lacks the specificity of measurement of attainment of individual specific student outcomes.

For programs teaching courses taken by students from multiple programs, data must be separated by program.

For more detail, please see the ABET Accreditation Compliance Notes - Criterion 4 document.

Criterion 5: Curriculum

Overall View:

A PEV should determine if the program's curriculum meets the minimum required topics stated for a commission. Note that these are not necessarily individual courses of the same name, but you must find evidence of topic coverage at the specified level. Many commissions require a culminating experience that builds on the prior curriculum. Note: curriculum requirements are different between associate and bachelor's programs, so it is important to select the appropriate criteria.

Commission-Specific Items

- EAC requires the student work exhibits appropriate standards and multiple constraints in the CAPSTONE design experience
- ETAC requires a minimum of discipline-specific content and has an advisory committee to oversee the curriculum.

Criterion 6: Faculty

Overall View:

A PEV should determine if faculty are competent and of sufficient number to deliver the courses and manage the curriculum within the confines of a reasonable workload and that the faculty governance is stable. Do the faculty have opportunities for professional development?

Criterion 7: Facilities

Overall View:

A PEV should determine if the facilities and instruction in their use are available to the students so that they can attain the student outcomes. Note that facilities must be safe, but that safety is an APPM issue.

Criterion 8: Institutional Support

Overall View:

A PEV should determine if the institution supports the program through stable leadership and adequate support staff and operating budget. Sometimes an issue in support can also be an issue in Criterion 6, Faculty, or Criterion 7, Facilities, but a single issue should be cited in only one of these criteria.

Program Criteria:

Overall View:

The program criteria often contain additional aspects having to do with specifics in curriculum coverage, minimal course levels, and faculty qualifications and experience. CAC adds a student outcome in the program criteria.

APPM:

Overall View:

The APPM consists of very detailed statements. Most commonly the PEV should ensure the program advertises itself in compliance with the APPM, and that the program name is consistent across the RFE, publications, web pages and student transcripts. The APPM also tells the PEV what materials to ask for in addition to the SSR and provides specific guidance on the public release of accreditation information by the institution and the program.

Decision-Making, Compliance, & Consistency

The Decision-Making Process

Pre-Visit

Using the Program Evaluator Worksheet and/or Program Evaluator Report specific to your commission, you should be able to make a preliminary evaluation of the program based on your review of the program's Self-Study Report, transcripts, and public material (websites and catalog). You should make a list of those issues that will require further investigation on-site and discuss these with your team chair. Review the last visit Final Statement. Pay attention to shortcomings cited and determine the status of issues that were previous shortcomings.

During the Visit

During the on-site or virtual visit, you may revise your evaluation after conducting interviews with faculty members, students, and administrators; reviewing documentation; and viewing facilities. You will share your findings with your team members at team meetings on Sunday and Monday nights. This will assist you in refining your recommended action. At the conclusion of the visit, you will provide your team chair with the recommended action for your program and an Exit Statement to support that action. It is essential all team members make decisions on findings in a consistent manner. All team members should listen carefully to the proposed findings of other team members to identify potential inconsistent findings in different programs and across multiple commissions where applicable

Post-Visit

The team chair develops the Draft Statement to the institution by combining and editing the program Exit Statement material from the program evaluators and adding material that applies to the institution as a whole. Two editors and ABET Headquarters staff review the Draft Statement for adherence to standards and consistency with other statements. It is then sent to the institution, which has 30 days to respond as part of due process. The team chair uses the response from the institution to prepare the Final Statement, which is edited again and then provided to the full commission for action. In preparing the Final Statement, the team chair may consult with the program evaluators as needed to determine whether there are any changes to the recommended accreditation action because of the institution's actions since the visit. Final accreditation decisions are made at the July Commission Meeting each year.

Evaluating a Program's Compliance with the Criteria

To decide if a program complies with each criterion and to recommend an accreditation action, follow these steps:

- Identify issues by criterion.
- Determine the appropriate finding.
- Select the key term that applies to the finding. Base your decisions on the criteria and/or the APPM, NOT on your opinion. Consider the resulting recommended action. Is it consistent with the nature of the shortcoming?
- Explain each concern, weakness, and deficiency in relation to the specific criterion using wording consistent with the definition of the shortcoming.
- Recommend the accreditation action. Prior to the site visit, your team chair will ask you where the program stands in overall compliance with ABET Criteria. Based on your preliminary review, you will select one of the following potential actions as described in the Accreditation Policy and Procedure Manual, Section I.E.12. This preliminary judgment may be revisited after you gather more information during the campus site visit. Your available accreditation actions include:
 - Next General Review (NGR)
 - Interim Report (IR), the team feels that a program may resolve weaknesses by a report submitted within two years.
 - Interim Visit (IV) – this is like an IR, but you feel the need for a team to go back to the institution to observe something.
 - Report Extended (RE) – next general review continuing from the IR
 - Visit Extended (VE) – next general review continuing from the IV
 - Show Cause Report (SCR), this is like an IR, but results from a deficiency.
 - Show Cause Visit (SCV), this is like an IV, but with a deficiency cited.
 - Show Cause Extended (SE), next general review continuing from SCR or SCV
 - Not to Accredite (NA)

General Review Terminology vs Action

If the evidence supports a program Weakness for any criterion, you must recommend either an Interim Report or an Interim Visit action (if there is no Deficiency). Note there is no difference in severity for the IR and IV actions. The only difference is whether the adequacy of the corrective action(s) can be determined based on a written report (with appropriate supporting documentation), or whether a visit is required to assess the adequacy of the action(s).

If the evidence supports a program Deficiency for a given criterion, you must recommend a Show Cause action for currently accredited programs or a Not-to-Accredite action if this is an initial review. Also, note a Not-to-Accredite action can only result from an evaluation of a new program or from a show cause visit or report.

Transcript Analysis

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Records of academic work, such as transcripts, provide direct evidence the institution's program requirements are met. ABET recognizes transcripts as the official record of student coursework in the United States; however, it may be referred to differently in other countries. "Record of academic work" and "transcript" will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this document

As part of your review of the self-study report, you will need to analyze transcripts. Procedures for doing this include the following:

- Transcripts can be provided electronically; however, programs are not allowed to upload transcripts to AMS for security and space reasons. It is recommended that the team chair work with the institutional contact(s) to identify an appropriate cloud-based or LMS system for hosting transcripts where the institution controls access.
- The program name must be shown consistently on the record of academic work of its graduates and in the institution's electronic and print publications (i.e. department web page, course catalog). The program name must be distinguishable from any non-accredited programs with which it could be confused by a potential employer or students. Identify any problems in this regard to your team chair.
- Make sure the courses counted toward the degree are consistent with the published requirements of the program. In cases where the record of academic work is for a graduate of an earlier curriculum, the institution must provide a copy of the appropriate curriculum. The institution also should provide justification for any variances, such as transfer credits or substitutions not clearly documented on the record of academic work. Feel free to ask for the institution's degree audit for each transcript to aid in your work.
- Check to be sure prerequisites are taken before each course that requires them and the course sequence on the record of academic work does not vary unreasonably from the recommended sequence. If courses are taken out of sequence, check to see if there is an indication of difficulty for the students in terms of the course grades. (If there are difficulties for students, then there could be a problem with the mechanisms for advising and the enforcement of prerequisites. If there are no problems, it could indicate prerequisite requirements that are not needed.)
- Request clarification for any apparent problems in the record of academic work. Do your transcript analysis and request clarifications soon enough to allow reasonable time for the institution to respond.
- Review transfer course and course substitution decisions for reasonableness related to course content and credit allocation. Review documentation of the decisions. If there are questionable substitutions, request clarification from the program.
- ABET expects the PEV to perform the transcript analysis and it is inappropriate to ask the institution to do so. However, it is fine to ask for the institution's degree audit for each student to aid in the PEV's analysis.