

Memorandum

July 30, 2007

To: Chairs of Accredited Recreation Park Resources and Leisure Services Programs

From: Dr. Roger L. Coles, Chair
Council on Accreditation



RE: INFORMATION UPDATE

Since a great many exciting and challenging changes are taking place within the Council on Accreditation, I want to take this opportunity to bring you up to date.

• Accreditation Manager

We are pleased to welcome James (Jimmy) O'Conner as our new manager. Jimmy did a similar job with Forestry accreditation and we welcome him and look forward to his leadership.

• AAHPERD

Although involved for 33 years as a founding organization formerly as AALR and now AAPAR have withdrawn their co-sponsorship of the Council. We are now solely sponsored by NRPA.

• Standards

In order to remain responsive to the needs of accredited programs and to remain at the forefront of evolution of parks, recreation, and leisure services education, the Council on Accreditation (COA) has been undertaking a thorough review of the existing accreditation standards. Based on this exhaustive review and a concurrent assessment of the role of accreditation in higher education, the COA is in the midst of a complete revision of existing standards. This document provides a brief summary of existing standards, the rationale for change, and a glimpse at the set of "outcome-based" standards that are emerging.

Current Status. Currently, standards address several major areas requiring specific levels of competence (knowledge, understanding, application). These include the following areas:

- 1.00 Unit Characteristics
- 2.00 Mission, Philosophy, Goals, and Planning
- 3.00 Administration
- 4.00 Faculty
- 5.00 Students

- 6.00 Instructional Resources
- 7.00 Foundation Understandings (General Education)
- 8.00 Professional Competencies
 - Conceptual Foundations
 - Profession
 - Delivery Systems
 - Program and Event Planning
 - Administration/Management
 - Legal Aspects
 - Field Experiences
- 9.00 Accredited Options
 - Therapeutic Recreation
 - Leisure/Recreation Program Delivery
 - Leisure Services Management
 - Natural Resource Recreation Management

These standards are written in such a way as to require an examination of processes—resources that are used by the unit and the curriculum that is taught to students. As such, site visitors and Council members evaluate compliance with standards that address program and university policies, existing facilities and structures, and class syllabi and textbooks to verify that these process standards are being met. The purpose of the self-study and subsequent visit is to document and verify existence of resources and content being taught by faculty.

Rationale for Change. Nationwide, however, a clear trend among prominent accrediting bodies is moving away from such process models in favor of student learning outcomes models. In very general terms, the movement is away from “what is being taught” to “what is being learned.” The Council on Accreditation believes that a student learning outcomes model is best suited to our discipline-related goals—educated, prepared, and qualified professionals; thus, we are working on revising accreditation standards and criteria that better fit this broad aim. It is also notable that, consistent with the national trend, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, which recognizes the COA, supports additional attention to student learning outcomes as central judgments about academic quality. The COA will be reviewed by CHEA in 2012 and is making the necessary programmatic and procedural changes to align with the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

In working toward a student learning outcomes model, the COA has been listening closely to perspectives of its constituents. It is clear from these discussions that the existing standards do not adequately address the full diversity of the parks, recreation, and leisure services discipline. Thus, the Council is in the process of developing relationships with groups that represent various elements of the profession—therapeutic recreation, sports management, natural resource-based recreation, tourism, and so on to ensure ‘a fit’ with those aspects of the profession.

New Standards Draft. With input from various constituent groups, the Council is currently working on drafts of criteria that will replace the existing standards. The new criteria closely align with the existing standards in several areas. This similarity is evident by comparing the existing standards with the following current draft of the new standards (note that these may change based on input from constituent groups and further evaluation by the Council):

- 1.00 Eligibility Criteria
- 2.00 Mission, Philosophy, Goals, and Planning
- 3.00 Administration
- 4.00 Faculty
- 5.00 Students
- 6.00 Instructional Resources
- 7.00 Student Learning Outcomes
- 8.00 Optional Student Learning Outcomes for Disciplinary Focus (or some such language)

Because of the change in orientation and focus of the standards (from process to outcome), the most significant changes are being suggested in Section 7.00 Student Learning Outcomes. In following best practices in establishing student learning outcomes, the criteria are few in number. For example, currently, accreditation asks programs to address 42 standards in the 8.00 series; this would drop to eight standards in the proposed 7.00 series.

The student learning outcomes addressed in the proposed 7.00 series of standards are designed to elicit evidence of student learning (rather than faculty teaching) as related to the criteria. They are broadly stated, and include interpretation for application.

The three broad areas of review are:

- Empowerment to Use Foundation Knowledge (with two sub-standards)
- Empowerment to Effectively Manage Agencies and Businesses (with two sub-standards)
- Empowerment to Design Recreation Encounters (with four sub-standards)

All programs seeking accreditation must meet standard series 1.00 through 7.00. The 7.00 series may be met by providing evidence of achievement within at least one focus area (e.g., therapeutic recreation, tourism, sports management). The key to compliance with the proposed 7.00 standards (those that address student learning outcomes) is documentation of outcomes that provide compelling evidence of graduates' abilities related to the areas targeted by the curriculum. The 8.0 standards series would be developed working closely with professional associations related to the parks, recreation, and leisure services field. For instance, the Resort and Commercial Recreation Association (RCRA) may wish to align with the COA to develop additional standards that reflect professional practice specific to their constituents. University curricula could then choose to be accredited by the COA and hold optional endorsement of accreditation in commercial recreation.

The revision and development process takes time, as does the implementation process. The Council wants to ensure that voices of all constituent groups are heard and that the process for implementation is smooth and workable. Thus, the COA is striving for the following timeline:

Publish draft standards for public review	September 1, 2007
Public review and input on draft standards	September 2007 – December 1, 2007
Publish revised draft standards for review	January 5, 2008
Publish review and input on revised standards	March 1, 2008
Develop training materials	2008 – 2009
Train pilot schools and visitors	2009 – 2010

Self-studies/Visits with optional standards	Spring/Fall 2011 and 2012
Compliance with new standards mandatory	Spring/Fall 2013

As information becomes available the Council will do its best to make that material available to constituents through the web, listservs, and other appropriate media. Input may also be provided by contacting the staff liaison for the Council at COA@nrpa.org.

Again thank you for your participation in the accreditation process. We will be seeking your input, involvement and counsel as we proceed cautiously and systematically into the future. Please feel free to contact any of us, as we serve to promote and better our profession. Best Wishes for a successful school year, starting again real soon.