

ACCREDITATION
MANUAL:

Optometric
Technician
Programs

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Accreditation Council on Optometric Education

243 N. Lindbergh Blvd. | St. Louis, MO 63141

314/991-4100 | E-mail: accredit@aoa.org | Web Address: www.theacoe.org

CHAPTER I | Introduction to Accreditation and the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education

THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a system for recognizing that educational institutions and programs affiliated with those institutions have attained a level of educational effectiveness, integrity, and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and public they serve. In many countries, the establishment and maintenance of educational standards are the responsibilities of a central government bureau. However, the American system of voluntary non-governmental evaluation, called accreditation, has evolved to promote both regional and national approaches to the determination of educational quality.

Although accreditation is basically a private, voluntary process, accrediting decisions are relied upon -- by governmental funding agencies, state licensing boards, scholarship commissions, foundations, and potential students. Accreditation at the postsecondary level performs a number of important functions, including the encouragement of efforts to increase educational effectiveness. The accrediting process requires educational institutions and programs to conduct a self-study to determine whether their mission and goals are being achieved; to consider the expert recommendations and suggestions of an impartial site visit team, composed of members with appropriate expertise which evaluates the entity based on its ability to meet predetermined standards; and to plan and execute internal actions to address the recommendations of the accrediting body. Those programs meeting the criteria are publicly designated. Since accreditation status is reviewed on a periodic basis, accredited institutions and programs are required to maintain continuous self-study and improvement mechanisms.

Two forms of accreditation are recognized in the U.S. -- **institutional** and **specialized accreditation**. **Institutional accreditation** is granted by the regional and national accrediting commissions of schools and colleges, which collectively serve most of the institutions chartered or licensed in the United States and its possessions. Institutional accrediting bodies recognize the entire institution rather than individual programs.

Specialized accreditation of professional and occupational programs is granted by councils or commissions on accreditation set up by national professional organizations in such fields as dentistry, optometry, nursing, physical therapy and other allied health fields. Each specialized accreditation group defines eligibility criteria for accreditation and operating procedures. A major rationale for specialized accreditation activities is to provide quality assurance concerning educational preparation of members of the profession or occupation.

ACCREDITATION IN OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

The primary purpose of accreditation in optometry is to assure the continuing quality of those educational programs that are accredited. The primary method of accomplishing this purpose is to determine the degree to which specific programs comply with pertinent Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) standards and to monitor continuing quality through annual reporting, specified visits, or other steps that the Council may find necessary.

Many specific elements of the accrediting process are critical to its success. It is important that the process be open, honest, respectful, and constructive. The team chair is responsible for assuring that these elements are understood by the team and appreciated by those in the program being accredited. The team chair should foster this atmosphere during the team orientation and in the way in which the site visit is conducted by:

1. **Creating a sense of mutual trust between the team and those in the program being evaluated.**

This implies that trust and respect should permeate the site visit process. The team should understand and appreciate that by virtue of requesting an accreditation visit, the program has voluntarily opened itself to scrutiny. The self-study is an intense process that indicates the program's desire to undergo self-evaluation.

The team must demonstrate that it is taking its role seriously by reading and understanding fully the program's self-study and knowing of past ACOE actions concerning the program. Moreover, the team should conduct itself in a way that demonstrates a desire to listen and understand.

2. **Making it clear that the team's function is to provide a valuable service to the program.**

The team must evaluate programs, make judgments, and reach conclusions in a manner that is fair and without prejudice. Criticisms should be constructive. The team should behave as a body of experts in accreditation that seeks to enhance the program on the basis of its stated mission and goals and ACOE's standards.

3. **Demonstrating a regard for the program's uniqueness and autonomy.**

The standards are at once specific and wide ranging regarding the elements that constitute a sound educational program. However, they should not be interpreted as a vehicle to squelch innovation. The team should be made aware that the standards provide a framework for excellence into which different means for educational planning and implementation can be utilized, and the program should be viewed in this light.

Team members should also appreciate that the accreditation visit is not for the purpose of prescribing a particular program structure or specific means for enhancement. The program must be respected in terms of its autonomy, and given credit for its ability to determine the means to respond effectively to the team's recommendations and suggestions.

THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL ON OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

HISTORY AND COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, formerly known as the Council on Optometric Education, was established in 1934 by the House of Delegates of the American Optometric Association. Currently, the Council is composed of eleven members, nine of whom are members of the American Optometric Association, and two public members. With respect to members of the Council who are members of the American Optometric Association:

- Three are optometrists of outstanding professional experience, who are not affiliated with any school or college of optometry and who are not members of any state board of optometric examiners;
- Two are members of the Association of Regulatory Boards in Optometry at the time of their initial appointments;
- Three are optometrists associated with optometric educational institutions accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, with one of the three having expertise in optometric residency education;
- One is an optometric technician and/or a person involved in optometric technician education.

The two public members of the Council are individuals who are not educators in or members of the profession of optometry. A public member of the Council also is not:

- (1) An employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that is either accredited or preaccredited by the Council or has applied for accreditation or preaccreditation;
- (2) A member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Council; or
- (3) A spouse, parent, child or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition.

MISSION OF THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL ON OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education serves the public and the profession of optometry by establishing, maintaining and applying standards to ensure the academic quality and continuous improvement of optometric education that reflect the contemporary practice of optometry. The scope of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education encompasses professional optometric degree, optometric residency, and optometric technician programs.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1

To serve the public, the optometric profession and the other communities of interest by ensuring the continued effectiveness of the Council.

Objectives

1. Maintain an independent and objective accreditation process.
2. Implement the accreditation process with integrity, transparency and high ethical standards.
3. Ensure that the orientation and training process for Council members, staff and consultants includes relevant information on optometric practice, health profession education, and higher education.
4. Identify competent individuals to serve as Council members
5. Train competent individuals who are appointed to serve as Council members
6. Develop and disseminate information on the Council's policies and procedures.
7. Inform the general public and the optometric, educational and accreditation communities of interest regarding the accreditation status of programs.
8. Maintain communication between the Council and its constituents.
9. Keep the optometric community informed of current trends and developments in specialized accreditation.
10. Serve as a resource on optometric accreditation.
11. Continue to seek the most cost effective way to provide the services of the Council.

Goal 2

To develop, maintain, apply and periodically review the Council's accreditation processes and the standards for accreditation of optometric education and training programs in the United States and Canada.

Objectives

1. Review optometric education and training programs and make accreditation decisions in accordance with Council's standards and procedures and the program's mission, goals and objectives.
2. Establish and disseminate standards, policies and procedures in accreditation manuals for the programs accredited by or seeking accreditation from the Council.
3. Comprehensively review the standards for accreditation at least every five years.
4. Solicit suggestions from accrediting teams relative to standards, procedures and process.
5. Solicit suggestions from the communities of interest relative to standards, procedures and process.

6. Identify competent individuals to participate in accreditation site visits and provide appropriate training.
7. Evaluate the performance of site visitors and team chairs and use the results of the evaluations to identify areas needing emphasis in the training process.
8. Monitor programs in the interim between evaluation visits through the use of annual reports, progress reports and interim visits.

Goal 3

To foster continuous improvement of the Council by remaining current regarding the contemporary nature of optometric practice, health professions education, and higher education.

Objectives

1. Review information relating to optometric practice, health professions education, and higher education that impact on optometric accreditation.
2. Continue dialog with representatives of optometric organizations, health care delivery systems, health professions, higher education and other accreditors.
3. Modify the accreditation standards, policies and procedures as necessary.

Goal 4

To foster continuous improvement of optometric education by valuing innovation and creativity in optometric education programs.

Objectives

1. Communicate to the communities of interest that the Council values innovation and creativity in optometric education programs that maintain acceptable outcomes.
2. Ensure that the policies and the procedures of the Council do not inhibit innovation.
3. Ensure that the Council and consultants perceive innovation as a positive approach to foster continuous improvement in optometric education.

Goal 5

To assure the continued effectiveness of the accreditation process by the development and application of continuous quality assurance, self-assessment, and external review of the Council.

Objectives

1. Maintain recognition by the U.S. Department of Education and Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

2. Seek external review by organizations that recognize accrediting bodies and follow accepted codes of good practice.
3. Engage in planning and conduct periodic self-assessments.
4. Evaluate and test the validity and reliability of the Council's processes.
5. Maintain a committee structure that involves Council members and other experts in planning, quality improvement, and self-assessment.
6. Seek regular input from the communities of interest relative to planning, quality improvement, and self-assessment.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL ON OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) as the accrediting body for professional optometric degree, optometric residency, and associate degree optometric technician programs.

In connection with its statutory duty to determine institutional eligibility for federal aid funds, the United States Department of Education conducts a program of evaluation, review and recognition of accrediting bodies to ensure that their actions are valid and reliable indicators of the quality of the educational programs offered by the accredited institutions. Educational institutions that are accredited by USDE recognized accrediting agencies are eligible for federal funds, provided certain other requirements are met.

The ACOE also has been recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA recognition signifies that the ACOE and other recognized accrediting agencies have met CHEA's standards for recognition. The ACOE is recognized by CHEA for accreditation of professional optometric degree programs (doctoral level), optometric technician programs and optometric residency programs.

The activities and policies of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education are regularly reviewed by the USDE and CHEA to ascertain whether the ACOE conducts a valid and reliable accreditation process. These external reviews help to ensure that the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is conducting its accreditation activities in a reliable manner that is responsive to public concerns.

POLICY CONCERNING PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THE SECRETARY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will submit the following information to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, either as a matter of course or on request:

1. Notice of final accrediting action taken by ACOE with the respect to the programs it accredits.
2. A copy of the ACOE annual report.
3. A copy, updated annually, of the directory of accredited programs.
4. A summary of the ACOE's major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if so requested by the Secretary to carry out the Secretary's responsibilities in specific federal legislation and regulation.
5. The name of any program it accredits that ACOE has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) program responsibility or is engaged in fraud or abuse, including the reason for the concern.
6. Any proposed change in the ACOE's policies, procedures or accreditation standards that might alter the ACOE's scope of recognition by the Secretary of Education or compliance with applicable federal legislation and regulations.
7. If the Secretary requests, the ACOE will provide information that may bear upon an accredited or preaccredited institution's compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution or program to participate in Title IV, HEA programs. The Secretary may ask for this information to assist the Department in resolving problems with the institution's participation in the Title IV, HEA programs.

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education does not practice, condone or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of age, sex, religion, race, creed, national origin, or disability.

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON DISTANCE EDUCATION

As defined by the United States Department of Education, distance education is education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies include: (1) the internet;

- (2) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
- (3) audio conferencing; or
- (4) video cassettes, DVDs or CD-ROMs, if these are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in 1-3 above.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education's accreditation standards have been stated in terms which allow flexibility and innovation. Regardless of the method(s) used to provide instruction, the Council expects that each accredited program will comply with the accreditation standards.

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND GUIDELINES

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education believes that in order to carry out its responsibilities of accreditation, maintain credibility in the accreditation process and confidence in its decisions, each member of the Council must be free to make decisions regarding accreditation without actual or perceived pressure or alliance to any organization or institution that the Council recognizes or to any political entity within the optometric profession.

Evaluation policies and procedures of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education shall provide a system to ensure fairness and impartiality in all aspects of the evaluation process. Procedures for selection of representatives of the Council who participate in site visits to programs shall reinforce this impartiality. Representatives of the Council should avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Representatives of the Council include Council members, consultants, administrative staff, and other agency representatives.

No member of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education should participate in any way in accrediting decisions in which the member has a pecuniary or personal interest or with respect to which, because of institutional or program association, the member has divided loyalties or conflicts on the outcome of the decision.

If there is reason to believe that a person representing the Council might not objectively evaluate the program, the Council Director should be notified. If there is uncertainty as to a possible conflict of interest, the Director should be consulted immediately. The Chair of the Council is empowered to make the final determination to resolve any questions regarding real or perceived conflicts. The following are examples indicating the probability of, or possible perception, a conflict of interest, but are not all-inclusive:

- 1) the representative is known to be a graduate, a consultant, candidate for or a current or former faculty member or administrator of the institution;
- 2) the representative has a family member employed by or affiliated with the institution;

- 3) the representative has served as a consultant or in some other official capacity at the institution.

No ACOE member shall act as a paid or unpaid external consultant on ACOE accreditation matters to any program accredited by or seeking accreditation from the ACOE. This prohibition of serving as a paid or unpaid external consultant will extend for a period of two years after completing service on ACOE.

STATEMENT OF POLICY ON CONFIDENTIALITY OF PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION

The Council shall enter into the ACOE form of Business Associate Agreement (“BAA”) with each accredited program that is a HIPAA Covered Entity, permitting the Council to receive Protected Health Information (“PHI”) from the program in the course of evaluating the program for accreditation. The ACOE adopts the following rules and guidelines related to PHI:

1. It is the policy of the Council that PHI, which includes any information that could identify an individual as a patient of the facility seeking accreditation, may not be used by the Council for any purpose other than for evaluation of the program for accreditation.
2. **Applicants and accredited programs may not include any PHI in any correspondence or materials submitted to the ACOE, including but not limited to self-study materials.** PHI that is included in any materials submitted to the Council will be destroyed. Programs may be required to resubmit materials if the originally submitted materials are destroyed because they contain PHI. The program is responsible for any resulting missed deadlines.
3. Site visitors may be exposed to PHI during site visits to accredited programs, for example during a visit to a clinic where patients are receiving care. Site visitors may not take copies of any PHI with them from the site visit and must maintain the confidentiality of all PHI to which they are exposed during the site visit. PHI shall not be shared with any individuals other than Council members, site visitors and staff that have a need to know the information in order to fulfill their official duties in connection with evaluating the program for accreditation.
4. All Council members, site visitors, and staff are required to sign a form certifying adherence to the Council’s policies on confidentiality of PHI, which is included in the “Certification of Adherence to Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policies By Members or Consultants of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.”
5. All Council staff and volunteers must participate in ACOE HIPAA compliance training on an annual basis.

It is the policy of the Council that individual site visitors will not sign separate confidentiality forms on site during a site visit. Confidentiality obligations exist between the Council – of which site visitors act as an agent for the limited purpose of conducting the site visit – and the program. These obligations are covered by these policies and the terms of the BAA or other confidentiality agreement entered into between the Council and the program, if any.

CHAPTER II | Standards of Accreditation

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education has adopted the following standards of accreditation by which all optometric technician programs seeking accreditation are measured. The programs will be evaluated during Accreditation Council on Optometric Education site visits to determine their compliance with these standards. The standards define expectations of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education with regard to an accredited optometric technician program and provide a framework for a program's self-study process.

FORMAT OF THE STANDARDS

The accreditation standards are divided into five major areas. Following each standard is a list of items which must be submitted to the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education with the program's self-study or as an appendix to the self-study before an evaluation visit is conducted. The self-study process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this manual.

OPTOMETRIC TECHNICIAN STANDARDS EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2019

Adopted by the ACOE at its Annual Meeting June 21-23, 2018

Standard 1 – Mission, Goals, Objectives

1.1 The program must have a published mission statement that describes the overall purpose(s) of the program.

1.1.1 The program must be centered on education and clinical training that results in the technician's ability to enhance patient care.

Examples of Evidence

- *A copy of the mission statement*
- *Document(s), hard or electronic, in which the mission statement is published*

1.2 The program must have a published set of goals that define the accomplishments necessary to achieve the mission.

Examples of Evidence

- *A copy of the goals*
- *Document(s), hard or electronic, in which the goals are published*

- 1.3 The program must have assessable objectives for each goal that specify how that goal is to be met.

Example of Evidence

- *List of objectives derived from the mission statement and goals.*

- 1.4 The program must annually review the fulfillment of its objectives to determine the degree to which it has attained its mission and goals. Such measures must include but not be limited to program completion rates, certification examination results and job placement.

Examples of Evidence

- *Program completion rates*
- *Certification examination results for last five years*
- *Graduate and alumni placement information*
- *Results of alumni/employer surveys*
- *Other outcomes assessments, as applicable*

1.4.1 Within the eight year period before each site visit, 70% of those who have completed the program must have been placed in a related job within one year of program completion, or the ACOE will initiate an appropriate review of the program.

Example of Evidence

- *Tabulation of post-graduate job placement rates in related fields.*

- 1.5 The program must engage in an ongoing, systematic process of planning and self-study and must review on a regular basis its program mission, goals and objectives and revise them as necessary.

Examples of Evidence

- *Written review process*
- *Agendas or minutes of advisory committee meetings*
- *Evidence of involvement of stakeholders*

Standard 2 – Curriculum

- 2.1 The program must be a minimum of one academic year in length or its equivalent.

Example of Evidence

- *Copy of curriculum sequence*

- 2.2 The curriculum must fulfill the mission, goals and objectives to prepare students for employment in an ophthalmic setting.

Examples of Evidence

- *Copy of curriculum*
- *Course descriptions*
- *Course outlines/syllabi*
- *Description of process for students to evaluate courses.*

- *Instruments used by students to evaluate courses.*
- *Completed student evaluations of courses*

2.3 The curriculum must include instruction in:

- General office procedures
- HIPAA regulations
- Ocular anatomy and physiology
- Ophthalmic optics and optical dispensing
- Clinical testing procedures
- Awareness and rationale for the use of contemporary equipment and procedures
- Contact lens procedures
- Common ocular conditions
- Common systemic conditions

Examples of Evidence

- *Copy of curriculum (see 2.2)*
- *Course descriptions (see 2.2)*

2.4 The curriculum must prepare students for employment as optometric technicians. At a minimum the graduate must be able to:

2.4.1 Skillfully and accurately collect data to be used by the doctor of optometry for diagnostic purposes including:

- Case history, visual acuity, color and depth perception testing
- Lensometry
- Interpupillary distance measurement, dominant eye and extraocular muscle testing
- Cover test and pupil testing
- Visual field testing
- Keratometry
- Pachymetry
- Tonometry
- Blood pressure testing

2.4.2 Apply principles of professionalism as they pertain to optometric practice, including:

- Maintain confidentiality
- Communicate professionally
- Maintain applicable ethical and legal standards
- Perform competently within the scope of training and education

2.4.3 Assist the doctor of optometry in the care of the patient, including:

- Administer and record specified topical and oral medications at the direction of the doctor of optometry
- Identify ocular emergencies and take appropriate action
- Prepare the examination and treatment area
- Identify medical terms of common ocular and systemic conditions/diseases.
- Implement emergency procedures and administer first aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- Implement infection control protocols

2.4.4 Assist patients in the optical dispensary, including:

- Explaining the features and benefits during the selection of frames and spectacle lenses
- Obtain needed facial and lens measurements
- Prepare and submit eyewear orders
- Neutralize and verify lenses
- Dispense, adjust and repair eyewear for the patient

2.4.5 Assist the doctor of optometry in the fitting and evaluation of contact lenses, including:

- Assist in the contact lens fitting examination
- Insert patient contact lenses
- Order and verify contact lenses
- Instruct patients in contact lens hygiene, insertion, removal and care
- Maintain contact lens inventory

2.4.6 Perform general office procedures, including:

- Use proper telephone etiquette
- Schedule appointments
- Accurately triage emergency patients
- Maintain patient records including electronic health records
- Perform financial transactions
- Understand the third party reimbursement process
- Maintain office and clinic inventory of patient care supplies
- Manage recall system

Examples of Evidence

- *Program outcomes statements; specific course objectives; and/or clinical evaluations*

2.5 The program must establish a set of competencies and evaluate the student's attainment of these competencies to assess the degree to which each student has mastered the course objectives.

Examples of Evidence

- *Course and clinical learning objectives*
- *Evaluation of clinical performance*

2.5.1 Criteria and procedures for measuring student progress must be predetermined and communicated to students at the beginning of each course.

2.5.2 Faculty evaluation of student performance must be conducted throughout the program. Provisions must be made for remedial measures, probation, dismissal, or other appropriate action for students who do not meet academic and/or clinical evaluation criteria.

2.5.3 A mechanism must be in place to provide the student with feedback on performance throughout the duration of the program.

Examples of Evidence

- *Course outlines/syllabi (see 2.2)*
- *Documents used to evaluate students' performance*
- *Descriptions of remedial measures, probation and dismissal policies*
- *Description of student appeal procedure*
- *Samples of student evaluation instruments such as quizzes, exams, laboratory work, term papers, and special projects*
- *Selected samples of student work*
- *Lab manuals and other reference materials used*

2.6 Clinical experience, designed to provide the student with competence in optometric technician skills, must be an integral part of the program.

2.6.1 Clinical experiences must be planned, supervised and evaluated by program faculty in cooperation with supervising clinical personnel.

2.6.2 Monitoring/supervision of the clinical experience must be demonstrated and reflect the program's mission, goals and objectives.

Examples of Evidence

- *Description of clinical experience*
- *List of clinical affiliates*
- *Description of the monitoring/supervision of the clinical experience*
- *Copy of affiliation agreement if applicable*
- *Student evaluation of clinical experience including affiliates*

2.7 There must be an ongoing curriculum review process.

Examples of Evidence

- *Description of curriculum review mechanism*
- *Minutes of faculty curriculum review meetings*

Standard 3 - Administration

- 3.1 The program must be a part of an institution that is accredited by a United States Department of Education recognized regional or national institutional accrediting body.

Example of Evidence

- *Evidence of institutional accreditation*

- 3.2 There must be a program director, as qualified below, to administer the program.

- 3.2.1 The program director must have at least one year of experience as a doctor of optometry, a certified para-optometric technician, or another para-professional within the optometric/ophthalmic field.

- 3.2.2 The program director must have the authority, responsibility, and adequate time to administer the program and to ensure the fulfillment of its mission, goals and objectives.

Examples of Evidence

- *Program director curriculum vitae*
- *Program director position description*
- *Program director's typical weekly schedule of teaching and administrative duties*

- 3.3 There must be a system to evaluate the program director at least once per year.

Examples of Evidence

- *Narrative of evaluation system*
- *Documentation of the evaluation system*

- 3.4 The program must comply with applicable state and federal non-discrimination regulations.

Example of Evidence

- *Published non-discriminatory policies*

Standard 4 - Resources and Facilities

- 4.1 The program must have a physical facility conducive to learning and equipment enabling it to meet its educational goals.

Examples of Evidence

- *Description of physical plant including classroom/clinical/laboratory facilities and equipment*
- *Planning studies and blueprints related to any proposed physical plant expansion, contraction or renovation which might affect program operations*

- 4.2 The institution must provide students and faculty reasonable access to information resources related to the profession of optometry and paraoptometric education.

Example of Evidence

- *Narrative describing institutional informational resources and library service*

- 4.3 The program must have adequate financial support to achieve its mission, goals, and objectives.

- 4.3.1 The program must have financial management procedures, audits and/or controls to guarantee effective monitoring and use of its funds.

Examples of Evidence

- *Narrative describing the budgetary process*
- *Applicable financial documents*
- *Budget information including but not limited to line item budget of income and expenditures for the past and present fiscal year*
- *Available budget projections for the next fiscal year*

- 4.4 The program must have adequate support staff, services, and resources to meet the needs of the administration, faculty, and students.

Examples of Evidence

- *Narrative describing support services and resources*
- *Organizational chart of program personnel*

- 4.5 There must be an advisory committee to maintain a liaison between the program and the optometric community.

Examples of Evidence

- *Advisory committee list*
- *Advisory committee minutes*
- *Narrative explaining the role of the advisory committee*

- 4.6 Faculty of the program must have the qualifications to educate and train the students in accordance with the mission, goals and objectives of the program.

- 4.6.1 Faculty of the program must have a minimum of an associate degree or certification or licensure in a related field.

Examples of Evidence

- *Curriculum vitae of program faculty*
- *Position description for program faculty*

- 4.7 The number of faculty must be sufficient to meet the mission, goals and objectives of the program.

Examples of Evidence

- *Program teaching assignments for all faculty*

- *Description of faculty/student ratio in laboratory and clinic*

4.7.1 There must be published policies and procedures for faculty recruitment, retention, promotion, academic assignments and responsibilities, reporting relationships, grievances, and benefits.

Examples of Evidence

- *Narrative describing policies and procedures mentioned in standard 4.7.1*
- *Document(s) where policies and procedures mentioned in standard 4.7.1 are made available to the faculty.*

4.8 There must be a faculty evaluation process that establishes goals and assesses performance of each faculty member.

Examples of Evidence

- *Narrative describing faculty evaluation process*
- *Copy of the evaluation instrument(s)*
- *Faculty/staff handbooks or union contracts that documents the evaluation process*

4.9 Opportunities must be provided for program faculty to continue their professional development.

Example of Evidence

- *List of faculty/staff development activities*

Standard 5 – Students

5.1 There must be a recruitment process that attracts and retains a qualified student body.

Examples of Evidence

- *Current entering class statistics*
- *Admissions statistics for the past five years including number of applicants and profiles of entering class.*
- *Retention statistics for the past five years*
- *Narrative discussing recruitment plan.*
- *Recruitment materials.*

5.2 Specific written criteria, policies and procedures must be adhered to during the admissions process to select students who have potential for success in the program.

5.2.1 The program must require that the accepted applicants have completed at least high school or the equivalent

Example of Evidence

- *Admissions policies, criteria and procedures*

- 5.3 The program must provide student support services including but not limited to academic, job placement, and financial aid counseling.

Example of Evidence

- *Narrative or documents describing academic counseling and other student support services.*

- 5.4 The program must maintain an orderly, accurate, confidential, secure and permanent system of student records.

Example of Evidence

- *Narrative or description of student records maintenance programs*

- 5.5 The program must publish and make available to students the policies and procedures on academic standards, grading, attendance, academic calendar, appeals, academic standing, dismissal and reinstatement, disciplinary conduct, due process, tuition, fees, refunds, honors, scholarship and awards, and other related matters.

Examples of Evidence

- *Copies of student policies mentioned in standard 5.5*
- *Document(s) where policies mentioned in standard 5.5 are published*

- 5.6 The program must publish and provide policies and procedures regarding student complaints and maintain records of receiving, adjudicating and resolving such complaints.

Examples of Evidence

- *Copies of policies regarding student complaints*
- *Record of student complaints, if any*

- 5.7 The program's publications, advertising and student recruitment materials and activities must present an accurate representation of the program.

Examples of Evidence

- *Publications, written policies, advertising, websites*

- 5.7.1 The program must publish current and reliable information on job placement.

Example of evidence

- *Job placement information*

REVISION OF OPTOMETRIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM STANDARDS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is committed to conducting a valid and reliable accrediting process. Review and revision of the optometric technician program standards are regular parts of the Council's activities. Programs or individuals that wish to suggest changes of the standards are invited to submit their suggestions in writing. The procedure for revision of standards is as follows:

1. The Council will review the standards at least every five years.
2. As part of the standard review process, the Council will circulate contemplated changes to accredited programs, schools and colleges sponsoring each program, schools and colleges of optometry, state boards of optometry, the U.S. Department of Education, and other interested parties. The comment period will be a minimum of 30 days.
3. Following review of comments on the standards, the Council may elect to recirculate a revised draft for additional comments.
4. When the comment solicitation and review process are complete, the Council will take action to adopt the appropriate changes to the standards.

The Council may review, revise, delete or add individual standards at any time it deems appropriate in accordance with the following process. If, through its system of review, the Council determines that it needs to change any individual standard, or the standards as a whole, the ACOE shall initiate the revision process within 12 months of determining that a change is necessary. The ACOE will complete the revision process in a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to the standards, the ACOE will provide notice to its constituency and other interested parties and provide a response time of a minimum of 30 days to comment on the proposed changes. The ACOE will consider comments from interested parties in the revision process.

CHAPTER III | Self-Study Process

The self-study is a key component in the ACOE accreditation process as it is in most accrediting processes for institutions of higher learning in the United States.

The primary purpose of the self-study is to involve the entire community of the optometric technician program in "looking at itself" for the purpose of self-improvement and long-term planning. It involves members of the community in a critical review of the program's mission, goals and objectives; in considering the impact of societal and economic changes affecting the program; and in identifying the program's strengths and weaknesses in the achievement of intended outcomes.

Moreover, the self-study report orients the evaluation team to the program. The self-study describes the entity that is being evaluated as to its resources, the constituencies whom it serves and who serve it, its mission, goals, objectives and the degree to which they are being met, its physical plant, and other factors. Essentially, a well done self-study enables the evaluation team member to obtain more than a superficial sense of the essence of the program. The self-study should enable the team member to come to the site visit with substantial knowledge of the backgrounds of the involved faculty, administrators and students, the financial integrity of the program being evaluated, and the intricacies of governance.

GUIDELINES FOR THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

The following recommendations will help foster the constructive attitudes and participation essential for a productive self-study.

1. The program director and faculty should work together to plan and guide the self-study to completion. It is essential to get an early start.
2. Program administrators, institution administrators, faculty members, students and advisory committee members should be involved in conducting a self-study.
3. The quality of the self-study process will be improved by focusing on the relationships of various activities to the program's stated goals and objectives.
4. The self-study must include a critical appraisal of the program's weaknesses and problems, as well as its strengths.
5. The self-study should include a clear enunciation of plans for remedying the program's deficiencies and weaknesses.

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

As noted above, the essential purpose of the self-study is to assess the results -- the outcomes -- of the program's efforts in pursuit of its mission and goals. Whereas mission and goals statements indicate the desired outcomes, statements of objectives should serve as specific means to accomplish these outcomes as well as criteria by which to determine the degree to which the mission and goals are being accomplished. The following definitions may be useful:

1. **Mission** -- The mission statement should express the overall purposes, intent and uniqueness of the program. It is a statement of the fundamental reasons for a program's existence.
2. **Goals** -- Goals specify the end results necessary to achieve the mission; they should elaborate each of the major components of the mission. They provide clarification and specificity for components of the mission statement.

For example, if one element of the mission is to "prepare individuals to assist optometrists in providing eye care," one goal derived from this could be "to provide the student with an understanding of the eye, vision testing, ophthalmic optics, dispensing, and contact lenses."

3. **Objectives** -- As the goals were derived from components of the mission, specific objectives should flow from the goals. Objectives are the specifications on how the particular goal is to be reached. They are statements which define outcomes attributable to the mission and goals of a program. To continue with the example, some objectives could be:
 - a. The student will complete at least 300 clinic hours.
 - b. The faculty will continually inform themselves about changes in the optometric profession.
 - c. The faculty periodically will review the curriculum to determine that both the clinical and didactic content are appropriate.
 - d. At least every four years the program will conduct surveys of graduates to ascertain their opinions on how well they were prepared after graduation. Faculty and administration will use the results of the surveys in their evaluation and planning.

These objectives at once inform the student of his/her responsibilities in terms of the stated goal, and provide a method for the program director to determine whether these responsibilities have been met.

THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS AND DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

Programs should initiate the self-study process at least 12 months before the scheduled site

visit. The self-study will be due two months before the site visit. Prior to this, the program should adopt a timetable for the self-study that starts with the appointment of the self-study committee, includes each step in the process, and ends with the date the self-study is to be sent to the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (at least two months prior to the site visit).

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education standards of accreditation for optometric technician programs state the conditions, resources, and other factors that the Council requires in the technician program. As such, the self-study should address the standards point by point.

While the Council does not prescribe the format of the self-study, experience has shown that a report presented on a standard-by-standard basis can demonstrate compliance with standards as well as give the program a framework in which to state areas of concern and areas of strength. Further, this format provides a concise basis for discussion between the program representatives and the site visit team. It should be noted that each standard and sub-standard must be addressed by dialogue. Tables, charts, etc. are not acceptable as the sole submission for any standard or sub-standard.

In addition to providing narrative pertaining to each standard, the program must submit evidence to demonstrate compliance with the standards either within the body of the self-study or as appendices. Examples of evidence are listed after each of the standards in Chapter 2. They are meant to be examples of possible relevant documentation rather than an exhaustive list. A program may choose to provide some, all, or none of these examples as long as it provides evidence to demonstrate compliance.

There are published materials on the subject of self-study. For a current bibliography, contact the Director of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

CHAPTER IV | Application and Evaluation Procedures

INITIAL APPLICATION

Inquiries about the eventual accreditation of a proposed optometric technician program should be directed to the Director, Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, American Optometric Association, 243 North Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141. In response to an inquiry, the Accreditation Manual: Optometric Technician Programs will be sent to the inquiring institution. In addition, the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is available to interested institutions for consultation and advice regarding the accreditation procedures and standards of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

In order for an optometric technician program to be eligible for accreditation by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, an institution must:

1. Be accredited by a USDE recognized regional or national institutional accrediting body.
2. Be legally authorized to confer either the associate degree or a diploma/certificate of completion in recognition of the successful completion of the optometric technician program. (The optometric technician program must be a minimum of one academic year or its equivalent).
3. Have employed a director or other chief administrative officer;
4. Have completed and submitted a self-study report according to the requirements outlined in Chapter III; and
5. Submit a formal letter of application from the chief executive officer of the institution.

The program must submit the self-study and formal letter of application with the accreditation application fee. The current accreditation fees are listed on the ACOE web site or may be obtained by contacting the ACOE Director.

The self-study report will be reviewed by the chair of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (or the chair may delegate to one or more Council members) to determine whether basic planning and development have progressed to a degree that would warrant an on-site visit as required prior to the consideration of an accreditation status. If the self-study report is deemed unacceptable or indicates deficiencies or weaknesses in the program to make it clearly unaccreditable, the Council may postpone an on-site visit until the problems have been corrected. After a site visit team conducts a formal on-site visitation, the team's evaluation report is submitted to the Council for its review. If the program is found to meet the Council's standards, the Council will grant an appropriate accreditation status. (Further details on this evaluation process may be found in this chapter.)

RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

Programs which hold an accreditation status will be re-evaluated on a regular basis. Normally, the month and year of the next evaluation is scheduled by the Council at the time it grants accreditation. However, programs are responsible to continuously maintain and improve the components of their program, especially those that have been identified by the Council as areas of concern. The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education may elect to request a new self-study and re-evaluate a program at any time with due notice to assess the effects of substantive changes in the program or to monitor developing situations. Programs will routinely be revisited at intervals no longer than eight years.

Evaluation visits will not be conducted during vacations and breaks since student and faculty input are valuable components of the accreditation process.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will not normally grant delays in the submission of the self-study and discourages an accredited program from requesting delays in its regularly scheduled accreditation visit. In extenuating circumstances, the program must submit a written request in a reasonable amount of time prior to the scheduled visit. This request must include documentation of the following:

1. The reason for the requested delay;
2. A report of the program's progress to date on the recommendations of the last evaluation report of the Council;
3. Other supporting documentation.

EVALUATION VISIT PROCEDURES

THIRD PARTY COMMENTS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education periodically evaluates accredited programs for compliance with ACOE standards. This process includes the consideration of third-party comments. The Council will publish the dates of upcoming site visits on its website. **Third party comments must address substantive matters relating to the quality of the program** and the ACOE standards and should be addressed to the Director of the Council at ACOE, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141. Comments must be received 30 days prior to the program's scheduled site visit date. (In cases where the exact date is not yet determined when the listing is published, the month and year of the visit will be listed, and the comments must be received by not later than the first day of the month preceding the site visit. All third party comments must be signed.)

Comments will be forwarded to the evaluation team and to the appropriate program director for response during the evaluation visit process.

COMPOSITION AND SELECTION OF THE EVALUATION TEAM

An on-site evaluation team which visits an optometric technician program normally comprises 2 or 3 members. Evaluation teams are appointed by the chair of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education. The staff of the Council will consult with the director of the optometric technician program to obtain advice concerning perceived needs. When the members of the evaluation team are selected, the names and a brief background about the proposed members of the evaluation team will be provided to the program director to determine whether there are any conflicts of interest perceived with any of the proposed members. If the program finds a real or potential conflict of interest with respect to a proposed team member, or any other problem which might interfere with the objectivity of any proposed team member, the Council chair will take action when deemed appropriate.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, while ultimately responsible for accreditation decisions, wishes to benefit from the expertise of as many groups and individuals as possible in the evaluation of optometric technician programs. The chair of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education selects persons from a group of identified consultants who represent certain areas of expertise to serve on evaluation teams. An evaluation team assigned to visit an optometric technician program is composed of at least one member of the Council and one consultant with special expertise in areas such as finance, administration, clinical science instruction, basic sciences, and curriculum. Each evaluation team shall include at least one educator and one practitioner. Subject to the above guidelines, the chair of the Council may choose from among the following groups:

1. **Council members** -- The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education includes nominees from the American Optometric Association, the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry, the accredited schools and colleges of optometry, the optometric technician field, and the public. Evaluation teams will be composed of at least one Council member, so that at least one of the groups represented on the Council also will be represented on evaluation teams.
2. **Consultants** -- All Accreditation Council on Optometric Education evaluation teams will include at least one consultant. The individual(s) chosen to serve in this capacity will be expert in areas in which the Council anticipates the institution evaluated may need special assistance. The consultant will participate fully in all team activities.
3. **Staff** -- A staff member of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education may accompany the team to assist in coordinating administrative activities during the evaluation visit. The Council staff person is responsible for making the necessary local arrangements with the program being evaluated, providing guidance on interpretation of the standards and procedures of the Council, and coordinating the preparation of the evaluation report with the team chair.

It is the policy of the Council to encourage interagency cooperation by conducting joint evaluation visits with regional and other specialized accrediting groups.

At the request of the program being evaluated and when it is deemed advisable by the Council, the Council is willing to conduct a joint evaluation or coordinate the date of the on-site visit with the visitation of the regional accrediting agency, or another accrediting agency.

Staff representatives of the U.S. Department of Education may also attend an on-site evaluation visit to observe Council evaluation teams. The U.S.D.E. representatives are present as observers of the process.

THE EVALUATION TEAM'S SCHEDULE

The length of an evaluation visit may vary depending on the complexity of the program, but on-site visitations to optometric technician programs are usually scheduled for 1-1/2 to 2 days. The chair of the evaluation team will consult with the director of the optometric technician program to develop the visitation schedule. Although there is no rigid schedule which the Council requires to be followed during an on-site visitation, the Council considers each of the following elements to be important and will expect all of them to be included at some point in the visitation.

1. An executive session of the team to be held prior to the initiation of the visit. The agenda, the schedule of the visitation, review of protocol for evaluation team members, identification of areas needing clarification with the program director, and discussion of the materials provided as they relate to the standards of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education are some of the topics discussed at this meeting. The team chair will also discuss the team members' assignments and review the expectations concerning preparation of the team report. At this session, the team will focus on the standards and discuss any questions they may have regarding the application or interpretation of the standards.
2. An entrance interview with the program director and others who may be designated by him or her on the first day of the visitation to discuss the following topics: the director's perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses and areas of concern of the program; the team's perceptions of areas which will require exploration and clarification during the site visit; discussion of the relationship of the optometric technician program to the parent institution; and other subjects selected by the program director and the evaluation team chair. The entrance interview will orient the team to particular areas of concern and the program director to the methods and procedures of the team.
3. A tour of the physical plant of the optometric technician program including extramural teaching facilities and external clinical sites, when feasible.
4. Conferences with the following individuals: the president and/or the dean of the institution sponsoring the program; the program director; admissions and student affairs officer; department chairs; students; faculty; librarian; and selected standing committees.

5. An open meeting with students (no faculty or administrators present) will be scheduled to provide the team with input on student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program.
6. An open meeting will also be held with faculty (no administrators or program director present) to allow the faculty to participate in discussions with the evaluation team.
7. A team meeting will be held near the end of the visit to allow the team to formulate its impressions and prepare a presentation of its findings to the program director.
8. Meetings with individual faculty, students and administrators at the discretion of the chair.
9. An exit briefing will be held as the final session of the on-site visitation which will provide the program director and others he or she may designate with insight into the findings of the team.

PROTOCOL FOR ON-SITE VISITATIONS

PROTOCOL FOR THE PROGRAM

The program director will be provided with a list of the names and addresses of the team. Two months prior to the visit, the program director will be required to mail each team member and the ACOE Director the self-study and supporting background.

Technician program administrators are expected to cooperate with the team during the evaluation visit by providing them with information and additional background materials when requested.

Program administrators are requested to provide the Council staff with suggestions for lodging of the team as well as for necessary ground transportation. Neither programs nor individuals affiliated with the program should schedule social activities for the team or any member of the team.

The program should provide the team with a secure conference room for team meetings and individual assignments. The team should be able to lock the room since it may contain confidential materials. The program director is asked to have the additional documents requested in Chapter 2 available for the team's inspection in the conference room.

During the course of the visit, the program director will be expected to provide the team with access to all program facilities including, but not limited to, class rooms, laboratories, clinics and record room.

PROTOCOL FOR EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education has developed the following guidelines for evaluation team members.

1. The primary function of an evaluation team is program analysis. Social engagements may interfere with this function. The typical evaluation schedule will call for team meetings and dinners each evening, so it is expected that team members be available to interact with the team to share information and observations. Individual team members should not accept social invitations from host administrators or faculty.
2. Team members will be provided the program's self-study report, previous evaluation report, previous annual reports of the program, and a record of any complaints received by the ACOE in accordance with the ACOE complaint procedure since the most recent evaluation visit, along with the resolution of the complaint(s). Team members are expected to familiarize themselves with these materials prior to the visit, and to request any additional needed materials as soon as the need is identified."
3. Team members must participate throughout the duration of the visit. Late arrival or early departure is a significant breach of etiquette that adversely affects the rapport and competence of the team and reduces its efficiency and effectiveness.
4. Although team members may discuss general findings and recommendations with program administrators during the exit briefing, team members must not express personal or team opinions regarding the accreditation status of the program under evaluation. Decisions relative to the accreditation status of educational programs are made exclusively by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education at regularly scheduled meetings, and only after thorough discussion and in-depth review of the evaluation reports.
5. Team members are expected to participate actively in conference discussions during the site visit, but they are cautioned to refrain from expressing their own personal opinions regarding teaching methodology or practice technique. Comparisons to the team member's individual program should be avoided.
6. Individual team members are expected to prepare reports **within two weeks** of the site visit on the areas of the program that are assigned to them by the evaluation team chair.
7. A draft of the evaluation report will be sent to the team when it is compiled. Prompt response by team members to the draft of the evaluation report is essential to the timely preparation of the final report for the Council.
8. When evaluation reports are presented to the Council for review and action during regularly scheduled meetings, evaluation team members on the Council are expected to participate in the discussion of the programs being evaluated, and, if necessary, to explain and elaborate on the reports.

9. Team members must treat all information and data obtained from whatever source regarding the program under evaluation as confidential. In addition, the disclosure of personal or team opinions with respect to the accreditation status of the program being evaluated is unauthorized at any time before, during or after the on-site visitation.
10. Three months following the Council's approval of the formal report, evaluation team members are expected to destroy their copy of the pre-evaluation materials and other documents relating to the visit.

COMPILATION OF EVALUATION TEAM REPORTS

The evaluation team report must serve not only the Council as an accurate basis for accreditation decisions, but also officials and administrators of educational institutions as an impartial guide to the qualitative aspects of their educational programs. Evaluation team reports, therefore, should reflect the Council's sensitivity to the multifaceted problems that confront institutions of higher education, and should also demonstrate the professionalism of the Council in its efforts to provide constructive analysis and recommendations for the improvement of the optometric technician program. Following the evaluation visit, each evaluation team member is expected to prepare a report on the areas assigned. If possible, it is highly desirable for the team member to submit at least a preliminary draft report to the team chair prior to leaving the site. If there is insufficient time for drafting the report during the visit, the team member should prepare separate reports and submit them no later than two weeks following the visit to the evaluation team chair for use in preparing the evaluation team report.

The evaluation team chair will assemble all sections of the report and edit the document to ensure consistency. The ACOE staff will assist the evaluation team chair in preparing the report and recommendations and in distributing them to the team members for comment.

Report writing guidelines are covered extensively in the ACOE's consultant training materials. Comments on each of the major standards listed in Chapter 2 of this manual should be included in the report. The comments should indicate not only areas that are not in compliance, but also areas that are weak or areas that are strong. Following discussion of the standards, the team should prepare a draft summary that highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and draft suggestions for program enhancement and recommendations. The final summary, which is called the Council Summary, will be finalized by the Council when the report is considered.

REVIEW OF FACTUAL ACCURACY

When accepted by the evaluation team, the draft report will be transmitted by ACOE staff on behalf of the evaluation team chair to the optometric technician program director, for review of the report for factual accuracy. The draft report submitted to the institution will not include any team recommendations or statements regarding accreditation status. In reviewing the

draft report, the program should concentrate on issues of fact. The institution may challenge the factual accuracy of any aspects of the draft report by submitting additional written information to the evaluation team chair. The evaluation team chair may modify the draft based on factual information or comments submitted by the institution.

The draft report reflects conditions at the time of the site visit. Consequently, if the institution has made changes since that time, these changes should be reported to the Council in the program's next annual report or in a petition for reconsideration of accreditation as described in Chapter 5.

FINANCING THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The American Optometric Association bears a portion of the expense for the activities of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, and the remainder is borne by accredited programs through annual fees and from funding from other interested organizations such as the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry. However, the cost of any on-site visitation to evaluate an optometric technician program by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is borne by the institution visited. Following the visit, the institution will be billed for the expenses of evaluators, consultants and Council staff. All accredited programs and programs applying for initial accreditation will also be billed an annual fee toward the cost of administration. Details about the current annual fees are available from the Director of the Council and are posted on the ACOE website.

PAYMENT OF ACCREDITATION FEES

All institutions offering programs accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) are expected to adhere to the due date for payment of the annual accreditation fee for each ACOE-accredited program sponsored by the institution. Invoices are sent in October, and payment is due to the ACOE by January 1 of each year. Programs are also expected to pay any site visit fees for which they are billed within 90 days of receiving an invoice. Programs which do not pay their annual fees by February 15 or site visit fees within 90 days of receiving the invoice will be placed on Administrative Probation by the ACOE Director, in consultation with the ACOE Chair. The CEO of the institution sponsoring the program and the program director will be notified of this status and informed that the ACOE intends to withdraw the accreditation of the program(s) at its next scheduled meeting if payment is not received.

CHAPTER V | Accreditation Procedures

The Council views accreditation as an ongoing process, which is subject to change based on changes in the program. The following procedures are designed to assist the Council in performing its responsibilities to help ensure the quality and continued improvement of optometric technician education.

COUNCIL REVIEW OF EVALUATION REPORTS

Following receipt of the response to factual accuracy from the institution, the evaluation team report with draft recommendations and suggestions is submitted to the Council for consideration at its next regularly scheduled meeting. All evaluation team reports are reviewed by the Council in executive session. Executive sessions are restricted to Council members, staff and consultants who may be invited by the Council chair. Consultants are not to attend Council meetings unless they are specifically invited by the chair.

At the Council meeting, the evaluation team chair presents the report to the Council for its action. The Council considers the report of the team, and takes action on the acceptance of the report, and on adoption of recommendations that relate to the standards and suggestions for program enhancement for the optometric technician program. If there are any unresolved conflicts with the institution on factual accuracy or for other stated reason, the Council may defer action on the report.

Recommendations relate to areas where the program is not completely in compliance with Council accreditation standards. Suggestions for program enhancement represent improvements that would substantially enhance the potential for excellence.

Following adoption of recommendations and suggestions, the Council determines the level of compliance for each of the standards—met, met in part or not met. For standards, which are not met or met in part, the Council specifies the reason the standard is not considered fully met. For all areas where a standard is not fully met, there is a corresponding recommendation that must be met to address the concern and to come into compliance with the standard. The Council then takes action on granting, continuing, modifying or revoking accreditation status.

Members of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education are expected to withdraw from consideration of the accreditation decision of a program when the member or the Council determines that there is or may be a conflict of interest. (See Chapter 1 for statement on conflict of interest.)

ACCREDITATION STATUS

Accreditation decisions are based on the Council's judgment of the total educational effectiveness of the program. This judgment in turn is based on the degree to which the program meets the standards of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education may decide to grant one of the two following accreditation statuses to a program following adoption of the evaluation team report and recommendations. Accreditation status may be lowered or revoked if the Council determines that the program is not making sufficient progress on Council recommendations.

ACCREDITED -- A classification granted to an educational program indicating that the program generally meets the standards for accreditation. This classification indicates that the program has no deficiencies or weaknesses that compromise the educational effectiveness of the total program. However, recommendations relating to marginal compliance with certain standards, and suggestions relating to program enhancement may be included in evaluation reports.

ACCREDITED WITH CONDITIONS -- A classification granted to an educational program with major deficiencies or weaknesses with reference to the standards of accreditation. This classification indicates that the educational effectiveness of the program is in jeopardy. Programs with this classification may be required to submit progress reports and shall undergo a full on-site evaluation visit within one year of the date of notification of Council action.

LENGTH OF ACCREDITATION

The Council accredits optometric technician programs for periods of time no longer than eight years. The accreditation is measured from the date of the most recent evaluation visit. Programs should avoid using phrases such as "accreditation has been continued for an eight year period." ACOE accreditation is not necessarily for a specific period since it is subject to continual review. Depending on the outcomes of annual reports, progress reports, interim visits, substantive program changes and other significant events affecting a program, the Council may decide to schedule a full on-site evaluation visit before the original eight year accreditation period is complete. Thus, while Council policies require that technician programs be evaluated at least once every eight years, many programs are evaluated more frequently.

When the Council signifies its desire to visit and evaluate an accredited program, a failure by that program to extend an invitation for a site visit may be interpreted as a lack of interest in further accreditation by the Council.

TIMEFRAME FOR COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARDS

In the event the Council determines that a program is not in compliance with any of the Council's standards, the Council shall require that such program take prompt action to correct

such non-compliance with the relevant Council standard(s) within the applicable frame as follows: 12 months from the date of the Council's decision if the program is less than one year in length; 18 months from the date of the Council's decision if the program is at least one year but less than two years in length; or two years from the date of the Council's decision if the program is at least two years in length. In the event the program does not bring itself into compliance with the applicable Council standard(s), the Council shall take prompt adverse action against the program.

The Council defines adverse action as an official Council action such as the denial or withdrawal of accreditation. The Council may grant good cause extensions for situations only where the program has made substantial, but not complete, progress toward compliance with ACOE standards, where a limited amount of time is needed to reach full compliance and where all reasonable alternatives for achieving compliance within the appropriate time period have been exhausted.

Typically, the deadline for compliance will be extended for no more than six months. The ACOE may grant no more than one extension to the deadline for compliance. In cases where the standard with which the program is out of compliance relates to outcomes of the program, the deadline for compliance may be extended to the end of the current program year to allow the program to document outcomes (such as completion rate and Board scores.)

DENIAL OF ACCREDITATION -- Accreditation will be denied to or withdrawn from programs which the Council judges to be substantially not in compliance with the standards of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education. Programs which are denied accreditation may appeal the decision or request reconsideration as outlined later in this chapter. When accreditation is withdrawn from a program that is presently accredited, the ACOE will set a date when the withdrawal of accreditation becomes effective. Usually this date will be at the end of the current academic year, unless there are special circumstances.

WITHDRAWAL FROM CONSIDERATION OF ACCREDITATION

An optometric technician program may withdraw its application for any status of accreditation at any time before a final decision is made on that request by submitting its intention to withdraw from consideration, in writing, to the Director of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

Any previously accredited program wishing to have its name removed from the Council's list of accredited programs should have the chief executive officer of the institution notify the Director of the ACOE in writing. The Council will report that the program has voluntarily withdrawn from the accreditation process on its next annual listing of accredited programs.

REINSTATEMENT OF ACCREDITATION

A program which has voluntarily withdrawn from accreditation, or which has had its accreditation withdrawn by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, may apply for reinstatement of accreditation by following the procedures outlined for initial application for accreditation in Chapter 4 of this manual. A self-study and evaluation visit will be required.

NOTIFICATION OF ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

A notification letter will be sent to the highest ranking officer of the institution within 30 days of the Council meeting at which the accreditation decision was made. When the optometric technician program is part of a university or community college, the notification letter and accompanying documents will be addressed to the chancellor, provost, or the local campus president as appropriate. Concurrently, a copy of the letter and accompanying documents will be sent to the program director and the dean of the school or college where the program resides.

The letter will include the accreditation classification that has been determined, the length of time until the next scheduled re-evaluation visit, and a copy of the evaluation report that was the basis for the Council's decision, including recommendations and suggestions for program enhancement. It will delineate the reasons for any change in accreditation status and specify the time lines for interim visits and/or progress reports. The letter will include a statement regarding the program's compliance with the standards and the program's expected time frame for coming into compliance with any unmet standards. The letter will also contain a statement regarding procedures for requesting reconsideration and appeal of the Council's accreditation decisions.

APPEAL PROCESS FOR ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

The Council will provide the chief executive officer of the institution a specific statement of reasons for any adverse accrediting decision. The ACOE will notify the U.S. Department of Education, appropriate state agencies and appropriate accrediting agencies of an adverse action or a decision to grant or continue the "accredited with conditions" status at the same time the program is notified. The decision of the ACOE becomes final at the end of 30 days following the program's receipt of notification of the action, if the program does not file a petition for reconsideration or appeal as specified in the following procedures. The ACOE will notify the public through its web site of a final decision for an adverse action or to grant or continue "accredited with conditions" within 24 hours of notifying the program of the ACOE's final decision. The Council may reconsider any adverse accreditation decision on its own motion, or upon the petition of an institution.

An adverse accreditation decision means an official Council action, such as the withdrawal or denial of an accreditation classification.

PETITION FOR RECONSIDERATION

A program desiring the Council to reconsider an adverse decision or determination of "accredited with conditions" must submit to the Council, in writing, a "Petition for Reconsideration" stating, with all necessary documentation, that:

the facts upon which the Council decision was based no longer exist or have changed significantly; or

the Council's ruling is clearly erroneous based on its construction of the facts; or

the Council's ruling is clearly erroneous based on its interpretation or application of the Accreditation Manual: Optometric Technician Program; or

any combination of the above.

A program may seek in a Petition for Reconsideration a review of new financial information provided that: (i) the financial information was unavailable to the institution or program until after the adverse accreditation decision was made; (ii) the financial information is significant and bears materially on any financial deficiencies identified by the Council; and (iii) the only remaining deficiency cited by the Council in support of a final adverse accreditation decision is the institution's or program's failure to meet Council standard(s) pertaining to finances.

This Petition for Reconsideration must be received by the Council no later than 30 days following notification of the Council's decision. The Council will consider the program's Petition and any oral presentation which the program may wish to make. If the problems or deficiencies that precipitated the adverse action have been corrected, or if upon further consideration and evaluation the Council agrees that some error of construction, interpretation, or application has occurred, the Council will take appropriate action.

APPEAL OF ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

If, following reconsideration, the Council sustains its decision to withdraw, deny or lower the accreditation status of the program, or to continue the program as "accredited with conditions", the chief executive officer of the institution or program affected may appeal the Council's decision to an ad hoc Appeals Panel. The appeal must be in writing and filed with the Secretary-Treasurer of the American Optometric Association (AOA) within 30 days of receipt of notice of the Council's action upon reconsideration.

The institution or program in its appeal shall allege, with necessary documentation, that:

the Council's ruling is clearly erroneous based on its construction of the facts; or

the Council's ruling is clearly erroneous based on its interpretation or application of the Accreditation Manual: Optometric Technician Programs; or

the Council's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which it took action; or

the procedures used by ACOE to reach its decision were contrary to ACOE's standards or other established policies and practices, and that procedural error prejudiced ACOE's consideration; or

More than one of the above occurred.

An institution or program may not appeal to argue that the facts upon which the Council based its action have changed or no longer exist; such an argument must be made to the Council in the reconsideration proceeding.

Within 30 days of receipt of the Appeal, the president of the AOA shall name three (3) persons to an ad hoc Appeals Panel, and three alternates, no one of whom shall be a member of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education or a member of the Board of Trustees of the AOA, or have had affiliation with the institution or program filing the appeal or with the accreditation process relating to that institution or program. The Appeals Panel will be composed of an educator, practitioner, and public member. Each member of an Appeals Panel shall comply with the Statement of Policy on Conflict of Interest and Guidelines and shall have appropriate training on the ACOE standards, policies and procedures.

The Director of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will determine the willingness to serve of the designated principals and alternates and notify the institution or program of the names of the three principals. If the institution shows good cause why a named principal is unacceptable, an alternate will be selected who is acceptable to both parties.

The Appeals Panel shall meet within 90 days of the date on which the program was notified of the adverse decision of reconsideration by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, or on a date which is mutually acceptable to the institution or program, the Appeals Panel and the Council. The institution or program may have one (1) representative appear before the Panel to make oral and/or written presentations and to respond to questions from the Panel. The chair of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education shall designate a representative to appear before the Appeals Panel to support the decision of the Council and to respond to questions of the Panel. Either party may be represented by counsel; however, the proceeding shall be conducted on an informal basis.

The purpose of the Appeals Panel is not to evaluate again the educational program; but rather, to determine whether ACOE's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which it took action, or whether the procedures used by

ACOE to reach its decision were contrary to ACOE's standards or other established policies and practices, and that procedural error prejudiced ACOE's consideration. The Appeals Panel does not serve solely in an advisory or procedural role but has and uses its authority to sustain, modify or reverse the decision of the Council or to remand the matter to the Council for further reconsideration with recommendations. Notice of the decision to the Council shall include a statement of the specific issues on which the decision is based and the specific issues the Council must address.

There will be no change in the accreditation classification of the institution or program pending disposition of an appeal. The Appeals Panel shall forward its findings and conclusions to the Council for action. In such case, the Council must act in a manner consistent with the Appeals Panel's decision and/or instructions. The institution or program will receive written notification of the result of its appeal and the basis for that result. The Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education will be notified of ACOE's final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend or terminate the accreditation of a program at the same time it notifies the program.

The cost related to appeal procedures shall be equally divided between the institution or program and the Council.

MONITORING ACCREDITED PROGRAMS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education employs a number of mechanisms to monitor accredited programs in the interim between evaluation visits. These mechanisms are described below.

THE ANNUAL REPORT

Annual reports are tools to assist the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education with monitoring and evaluating the program's continued compliance with accreditation standards in the interim period between evaluation visits. The annual report should provide the Council with the following information:

- Notification of significant developments at the program including change in the program director and/or key faculty;
- An overview of the state of affairs at the institution;
- Plans for the coming year;
- A summary of outcome assessments made during the previous year;
- Enrollment figures for the present year and projections for enrollment for the future year;
- Job placement information from most recent graduating classes;
- Outcomes data including results of students on national (strike-registry) certification or board examinations;

- A description of progress made on implementing each of the recommendations and suggestions of the previous evaluation report; and
- Notification of the nature and extent of any substantive changes contemplated in the program.

The annual report must be submitted to the Council by September 30 of each year. The Optometric Technician Committee of the Council will review the reports annually.

Programs will be notified following review if their report satisfied a recommendation of the evaluation report or if further information is needed.

THE PROGRESS REPORT

The progress report is a mechanism which requires the chief executive officer of a program to submit a document indicating the degree to which recommendations contained in the most recent formal Council evaluation report or other identified concerns have been implemented. The Council may require a progress report of any accredited program. Determination of need for the progress report will be made by the Council when it reviews the program's evaluation report or annual report. The Council will specify a due date when the progress report is required. Following receipt of the report from the institution, the Council will review it at its next regularly scheduled meeting. If the progress reported is satisfactory, a program with the status of accredited with conditions may be raised to accredited status. On the other hand, if the progress reported is unsatisfactory or the report is not received by the due date, the Council may either require a representative of the institution to appear before it to explain the lack of progress, or schedule a special re-evaluation to determine the basis for the lack of progress.

If a program submits a progress report to detail action taken to address recommendations and to demonstrate compliance with the Council standards, and the Council finds upon review of the progress report that the program has not come into compliance with the standards by the deadline for compliance, the Council will withdraw accreditation, unless it extends the deadline for good cause.

In preparing the progress report, the program should focus on the particular areas requested by the Council and should also report on progress made on each recommendation of the most recent evaluation report. The program should describe in detail its accomplishments toward implementing the specific recommendation or addressing the area of concern. Other areas identified by the institution may also be included in the report.

INTERIM VISITS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education may elect to conduct an interim visit to a program between full evaluation visits. Interim visits are initiated by the Council or at the request of the institution for several reasons:

1. As the result of concerns identified in an evaluation report or interim visit report; or
2. Lack of progress on concerns identified in an evaluation visit, interim visit or progress report, or during the annual report review; or
3. As the result of a substantive program change; or
4. Change in leadership of the program; or
5. Other concerns which come to the attention of the Council.

Interim visits, by their very nature, address a specific area of concern. However, an interim visit for the purpose of addressing issues broader in scope may be considered at the discretion of the Council. The program must submit a report on the area(s) to be evaluated during the visit, at least one month prior to the visit.

Interim visit teams are generally composed of two evaluators at least one of whom is a member of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education. The length of the interim visit will generally be one day. The interim visit chair or the Council staff will consult with the program director to establish the length and agenda for the visit.

Following the interim visit, the team will prepare a report which will be sent to the program for review of factual accuracy. It will then be submitted to the Council for consideration. The following are examples of outcomes that might result from an interim visit:

- Acceptance of the report by the Council with a full evaluation visit scheduled at the previously determined time;
- Additions and/or deletions to the current list of recommendations may be made;
- Acceptance of the report by the Council with a request by the Council for a full evaluation visit to occur on an accelerated schedule;
- A lowered accreditation status;
- Loss of accreditation;
- Other action deemed appropriate by the Council.

If a negative decision or adverse action results from an interim visit, the program will have the opportunity to appeal according to procedures described previously in this Chapter.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

Through the annual report, progress reports and interim visits, the Council continuously monitors the general quality of the education provided by accredited programs. An optometric technician program receives its recognition on the basis of evaluation and accreditation of its

educational program. Any institution which contemplates a substantive change in its optometric technician program should receive concurrence from the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education prior to formal adoption thereof. By "substantive change," the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education means new educational policies, practices, or programs that affect:

- The program's mission, goals and objectives;
- The scope, length and/or content of the program;
- Resources.

The following are examples of changes that the Council considers substantive. This list is not all inclusive, and the Council reserves the right to exercise its judgment to determine whether a change is substantive.

- The institution of educational policies which allow for awarding transfer credit to significant numbers of students in the program for the purpose of providing them with advanced standing.
- New affiliations or mergers with other institutions.
- Substantial increases or decreases in enrollment.
- Substantial increases or decreases in faculty.
- Substantial change in financial resources.
- Substantial change in mission of the program.

Substantive changes must be submitted to the Council in writing for its assessment and approval prior to implementation. Failure to comply with this policy may result in the scheduling of an interim site visit, or in extreme cases, the lowering or withdrawal of the program's accreditation status after due notice and an opportunity for a hearing.

The program must report to the Council in writing within thirty days if a substantive change that was not contemplated occurs. This report must document how the program will continue to meet the accreditation standards.

When a change occurs, and the program is not certain whether the change is major or minor, the staff of the Council should be consulted immediately.

INTERRUPTION OF EDUCATION POLICY

Interruption of an accredited educational program due to unforeseen circumstances is a potentially serious problem. If such interruption may compromise the quality and effectiveness of education, the Council must be notified in writing of any such disruption. The program must provide a comprehensive plan for how the loss of its clinical and didactic components will be addressed. Programs accepting educational responsibility for displaced students in O.D. and technician programs and residents must submit their plans to deal with any substantive change.

CHAPTER VI | In the Public Interest

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education takes seriously its responsibility as an accrediting body to inform and assure the public about the quality of educational programs in optometry. The ACOE will publish its accreditation decisions, including the basis for any final decisions, on its web site within 30 days of the decision. The information to be published will include:

- the type of program (professional optometric degree, optometric residency, or optometric technician);
- the program's sponsor, and in the case of an optometric residency not sponsored by a school or college of optometry, the name of the affiliated optometric institution;
- accreditation status or action;
- the year of the next currently scheduled site visit;
- and the Council's summary of compliance with the standards, which specifies the Council's basis for any final decision.

Updates to the summary of compliance will be published when the ACOE determines that the standards are met. The ACOE also publishes on its web site a directory of accredited programs, which is updated following each ACOE meeting, and when major changes occur. The Council also publishes an annual report that is available to the public upon request listing its accreditation decisions, the names of the programs removed from the list of accredited programs, and reasons for removal. Third parties may submit written comments regarding a program's qualifications for accreditation.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will regularly monitor catalogs and appropriate publications of optometric technician programs to determine that programs are accurately portrayed to the public. If the program elects to publicly disclose its ACOE accreditation status, it must accurately list its status and include the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education's name, address and phone number. Further, the Council requires that programs be accurate in all references to the areas and levels for which accreditation has been received.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF ACCREDITATION REPORTS

Council policy specifies that evaluation reports are confidential and are not disclosed except to the educational institution involved. Premature and/or unauthorized disclosure of information reflecting the evaluation team's or Council's conclusions and recommendations concerning accreditation status of an accredited program may seriously jeopardize the Council's position as an accrediting agency, and adversely affect the program or institution. The Council expects the

chief executive officer of educational institutions to make Council evaluation reports available to faculty members, members of the governing board and others directly concerned.

Council members, evaluation team members and consultants are not authorized under any circumstances to disclose information obtained during on-site visitations or during Council meetings. The extent to which publicity is given to evaluation reports is determined by the chief executive officer of the educational institution. It is the obligation of the Council to maintain the confidentiality of its relationships with institutions and not to announce publicly any action with respect to an institution other than its accreditation classification or its removal from the accredited list.

However, when an institution so conducts its affairs that they may become a matter of public concern, the Council may find it necessary to make public its actions. Moreover, when the Council is thus forced to make its actions public, it cannot avoid the necessity of explaining, to whatever extent it deems necessary and appropriate, the basis for its action. This may result in some departure from the usual confidential character of the Council's relations with an institution.

PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS ALLEGING VIOLATION OF ACCREDITATION COUNCIL ON OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION STANDARDS BY ACCREDITED PROGRAMS

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, through its established procedures of evaluation and monitoring, attempts to ensure that professional optometric degree, optometric residency and optometric technician programs maintain high standards of educational quality.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education does not serve as an arbiter or mediator of disputes that may arise between the programs and other parties. However, the Council is interested in hearing from groups or individuals who may have specific complaints relating directly to the lack of compliance with the accreditation standards and requirements of the Council.

PROCEDURES FOR FILING A COMPLAINT

An individual or group desiring to file a complaint with the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education shall submit the complaint in writing, signed by the complainant, to the Director or the Chair of the Council. The complaint must be specific in detail and include all information the complainant wishes considered. Upon request and if possible, the Council may withhold or protect the identity of the complainant.

Complaints received by the Council that do not relate to the standards of accreditation or that do not have sufficient documentation to warrant an investigation will be disposed of in an appropriate manner at the discretion of the ACOE Executive Committee, which is composed of the ACOE Chair, Vice-Chair and Director. If it is determined that no investigation is warranted, the complainant shall be so informed.

Upon receipt of a relevant complaint, the Council will forward within 20 business days a copy to the chief executive officer of the program for response. If the name of the complainant is being withheld/protected, the Director shall summarize the complaint or redact identifying information prior to forwarding to the institution or program. The program will have 20 business days to respond to the complaint and to provide all information it would like considered. The Chair of the Council may grant an extension of time to respond to the complaint if warranted. A request for delay must be submitted in writing within the 20 business day period referenced above. If a site visit is scheduled within the response time frame, the response may be provided as set forth below.

If an on-site evaluation is scheduled to begin within 90 days of the receipt of the complaint, the Council will also refer the complaint to the chair of the evaluation team visiting the program for investigation and action during the regular course of the evaluation process. If the complaint is not referred to the chair of the next evaluation team, the chief executive officer of the program, or other appropriate person, will be asked to provide the Council with a written summary of actions that led to the complaint and any actions taken as a result of the complaint, including appropriate documentation available to support the summary.

If the response received from the program satisfactorily demonstrates that the program is in compliance with the ACOE standards, the ACOE Executive Committee may dispose of the complaint in a manner it deems appropriate or opt to refer the matter to the Council as a whole for further consideration.

If the complaint's allegations appear to be substantial and tend to suggest lack of compliance with one or more standards and requirements of accreditation, the Chair of the Council will appoint two members of the Council who have no conflicting relationship with the program in question, including one public member, who will investigate the complaint. The public member will preside and direct the investigation.

The investigation may, but need not necessarily, include a visit to the program against which the complaint was filed and may involve such hearings as deemed appropriate. This two-member investigative team shall have access to any and all information relevant to its inquiry. Upon completion of the investigation, the chair of the team shall report to the Council at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The Council shall take appropriate action, including but not limited to dismissing the complaint, requiring an interim visit, scheduling a full evaluation visit, or other appropriate corrective action to bring the program into compliance with the accreditation standard(s) in question. The complainant and the program will be informed of the results of the investigation within 30 business days of a decision.

Each ACOE accredited program shall inform its students or residents of the Council's mailing address and/or telephone number, the procedures for filing complaints, and that only complaints relating directly to the lack of compliance with standards and requirements of accreditation will be considered by the Council. The Council will not intervene on behalf of individuals or act as a court of appeal for individuals in any matters. The Council will not consider complaints on matters that are not related to the standards of accreditation.

The costs related to the complaint process will be divided equally between the Council and the program.

The ACOE will maintain records of complaints about accredited programs received as well as the resolution of the complaints. Pursuant to U.S.D.E. policies, evaluation teams will receive records of any complaints pertaining to a program being reviewed that have been received since the program's previous evaluation visit.

PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS NOT RELATED TO ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

- 1) A complaint or inquiry regarding the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) other than the merits of an accreditation decision may be initiated by filing a written complaint with the ACOE's Director. The complaint must identify the specific matters complained of, set forth in detail the facts and reasons claimed to support the allegations and must include pertinent documents in possession of complainant relating to the complaint.
- 2) Upon receipt of a written complaint regarding ACOE actions other than the merits of accreditation decisions, the ACOE shall have 45 days to conduct an investigation of the allegations in the complaint if warranted. If it is determined that no investigation is warranted, the complainant shall be so informed. The investigation may include, without limitation, interviews with persons having information regarding the allegations and a review of materials relevant to the complaint. Any individual with information regarding the allegations may also be asked to provide documents and comments relating to the complaint.
- 3) The Chair of the ACOE may appoint a committee to conduct the above referenced investigation into the allegations of the complaint. (If the complaint concerns the Chair, the ACOE may appoint a committee to conduct the investigation.) Following the investigation, the committee shall prepare a written report to the ACOE stating the findings of the investigation. The person(s) filing the complaint will be provided with a copy of the written report and will be provided with an opportunity to submit written comments to the ACOE on the investigation report. Any written comments shall be submitted to the full Council within thirty (30) days following receipt of the report.
- 4) Following review of the findings and additional written comments, if any, the Council at a duly scheduled meeting shall make a determination with respect to the allegations of the

complaint. Within 15 business days following the decision, a written report shall be prepared specifying factual findings of the ACOE and the actions, if any, that the ACOE will take with respect to the complaint, including but not limited to dismissing the complaint, requiring a new site visit evaluation, or other remedial action. The complainant(s) will be provided with a copy of the ACOE decision.

- 5) The person(s) filing the original complaint may appeal the decision of the Council by filing the appeal, in writing and stating specific reason(s) for the appeal, with the Secretary-Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the American Optometric Association, within 30 days following notification of the decision of the Council. Within 15 days of receipt of the Appeal, the President of the AOA shall name three (3) persons to an ad hoc Appeals Panel, and three alternates, no one of whom shall be a member of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education or a member of the Board of Trustees of the AOA, or have had affiliation with the institution, program, or person(s) filing the appeal or with the accreditation process relating to an institution or program. No additional fact finding may be undertaken regarding the initial complaint, unless requested by the Appeal Panel.
- 6) Within 60 days after appointment, the Appeal Panel shall schedule and convene a meeting to hear or receive presentations from the complainant and the Council or their respective representatives. The complainant(s) will have an opportunity to have one (1) representative appear before the Appeal Panel to make oral and/or written presentations and to respond to questions from the Panel. The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will designate a representative to appear before the Panel to support the decision of the Council and to respond to questions of the Panel. Either party may be represented by counsel; however, the proceeding shall be conducted on an informal basis.
- 7) The Appeal Panel shall review the materials presented and shall reach a decision within 15 days of the meeting. The Appeal Panel decision may be to sustain, modify or reverse the decision of the Council or to remand the matter to the Council for reconsideration with recommendations. The decision of the Appeal Panel shall be in writing, shall state the pertinent finding of facts and conclusions, and the actions approved by the Panel. The Appeal Panel shall forward its findings and conclusions to the Council for action, and shall provide complainant(s) with a copy of the Appeal Panel decision.
- 8) During the period of the investigation, the ACOE will maintain the confidentiality of the information and documents submitted to it, except to the extent it deems necessary and appropriate in order to conduct a thorough inquiry.

CONSIDERATION OF ACTIONS OF OTHER ACCREDITING GROUPS AND NOTIFICATION OF WITHDRAWAL

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will review the accreditation status of any optometric technician program located within an institution that has been placed on public probation or that has had its accreditation or pre-accreditation status revoked by any USDE recognized accrediting agency. The purpose of the review will be to determine if the ACOE should take adverse action against the program or lower its accreditation status to “accredited with conditions.” The Council will provide the program with due notice of its intended review. Programs which are currently accredited by ACOE as well as those seeking initial accreditation are required to notify ACOE if the accreditation of their parent institution is revoked, or if the parent institution is placed on public probation.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education shall take into account decisions made by recognized institutional accrediting agencies or State agencies. If the ACOE determines that an institution sponsoring an ACOE accredited program or a program seeking ACOE accreditation is the subject of an interim action or threatened loss of accreditation or legal authority to provide postsecondary education, the ACOE will act as follows:

Programs accredited by ACOE

If a recognized institutional accrediting agency takes adverse action with respect to the institution offering the program or places the institution on public probationary status, the ACOE shall promptly review its accreditation of the program to determine if it should take adverse action against the program.

The ACOE shall not renew the accreditation status of a program during any period in which the institution offering the program--

1. is the subject of an interim action by a recognized institutional accrediting agency potentially leading to the suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or pre-accreditation;
2. is the subject of an interim action by a State agency potentially leading to the suspension, revocation, or termination of the institution’s legal authority to provide postsecondary education;
3. has been notified of a threatened loss of accreditation, and the due process procedures required by the action have not been completed; and/or
4. has been notified of a threatened suspension, revocation, or termination by the State of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education, and the due process procedures required by the action have not been completed.

Programs applying for accreditation by ACOE

In considering whether to grant initial accreditation to a program, the ACOE takes into account actions by:

1. recognized institutional accrediting agencies that have denied accreditation or pre-accreditation to the institution offering the program, placed the institution on public probationary status, or revoked the accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution; and
2. a State agency that has suspended, revoked, or terminated the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education.

Granting of ACOE accreditation notwithstanding actions by other agencies

If the ACOE grants accreditation to a program notwithstanding the actions described in this policy, the Council shall provide to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education within 30 days of ACOE action, a thorough explanation, consistent with the accreditation standards, why the previous action by a recognized institutional agency or the State does not preclude ACOE's grant of accreditation."

The ACOE will, upon request, share with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized state approval agencies information about the accreditation or preaccreditation status of a program and any adverse actions it has taken against the accredited or preaccredited program.

As an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will notify the USDE Secretary of any action the Council takes to withdraw an accredited status from a program or to place an accredited program on a publicly announced probationary status. As required for recognition by the USDE, the Council will forward a notice of all final accrediting actions taken at each meeting to the USDE Secretary. The Council will also notify the Secretary of ACOE's final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend or terminate the accreditation of a program at the same time it notifies the program.

When the Council makes a final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, or terminate a program's accreditation status, it shall notify the affected program within 30 days after such action. That notification letter shall include a statement that the Council must make available to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, appropriate accrediting agencies and the public the decision and a brief summary of the Council's reasons for the determination as well as any comments that the program may wish to make regarding such decision. The notice shall request that the program submit any brief comments that would be made available to the public not later than a specified date that is within 50 days after such final decision is made. The Council reserves the right to ensure that such comments are accurate and not defamatory.

Within sixty (60) days after the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education makes a final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, or terminate a program's accreditation status, ACOE shall make available to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public, such decision and a brief summary of the reasons for the ACOE's determination, as well as any comments that the affected program may wish to make regarding such decision.

Within 30 days of receiving notification of voluntary withdrawal from accreditation or preaccreditation from a program, the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will notify the US Department of Education, the appropriate state board of optometry and other appropriate state agencies, appropriate accrediting agencies, and upon request, the public of the program's decision to voluntarily withdraw.

If a program lets its accreditation or preaccreditation lapse, the ACOE will notify the US Department of Education, the appropriate state board of optometry and appropriate state agencies, appropriate accrediting agencies and upon request, the public within 30 days of the date on which the accreditation lapses. Accreditation or preaccreditation lapses when a program fails to continue the regularly scheduled process of accreditation, and no extension in which to comply has been requested by the program and granted by the ACOE.

CHAPTER VII | Conclusion

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education's prime purpose as an accrediting agency is to ensure the quality and continued improvement of optometric education by establishing and applying valid and reliable educational standards that reflect the evolving practice of optometry. In the final analysis, accreditation and its self-study procedures should provide stimulation to institutions to ensure continued growth and improvement in the teaching program through the assessment of levels of achievement of its mission, goals and objectives.

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education in its evaluation of optometric technician programs welcomes inquiries relative to the interpretation of its standards and procedures. The Council reserves the right to collect data periodically from each of the technician programs participating in its accreditation process and may revisit and re-evaluate any of them at any time, provided that proper notice is given and adequate opportunity for preparation is allowed. Finally, the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education is committed to providing accurate public information to potential students, the government and the public who may have questions about optometric education. The Council's regularly published lists will provide an overview of programs' accreditation status.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accreditation – The process of self-study and external review which ensures that a program of optometric technician education meets or exceeds the standards applicable to that program.

Educator—For professional optometric degree programs and residencies, someone directly engaged in education at a school or college of optometry (e.g., professor, instructor, academic dean) (or who has retired within the last two years from optometric education); for optometric technician education programs, someone engaged in education at an optometric technician program, or who has retired within the past two years from an optometric technician program.

Examples of Evidence – Documentation the program provides to the Council as evidence the program meets the standard. The examples listed are not all inclusive, and the program may choose to use all, some, or none of the examples in its documentation. However, the Council does require the program to submit appropriate documentation as evidence of meeting the standard.

Goals – Goals specify the end results necessary to achieve the mission; they should elaborate each of the major components of the mission. They provide clarification and specificity for components of the mission statement.

Mission – A statement of the fundamental reasons for a program’s existence.

Objectives – Statements which define outcomes attributable to the mission and goals of a program.

Outcome – An assessable quantity or quality relative to the overall success of a program in the achievement of its mission, goals and objectives.

Practitioner—someone directly engaged in the practice of optometry in a setting that is primarily devoted to patient care (or who has retired within the last two years from the practice of optometry).

Program – An optometric technician program is an educational program that trains individuals to support the doctor of optometry in the delivery of eye care to their patients. These programs are a minimum of one academic year in length or its equivalent.

Publish – To make available to the communities of interest (students and their families, counselors, education community, and the general public) by print or electronic means.

Standard – A measurable criterion of the quality of one or more components of a program of

optometric technician education.

Substantive Change – New educational policies, practices or programs that affect: 1.) the program’s mission, goals and objectives; 2.) the scope, length and/or content of the program; and 3.) resources of the program.