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ACEN Accreditation Manual

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2023 Accreditation Manual

The 2023 ACEN Accreditation Manual is comprised of general information about the ACEN accreditation process and procedures and a supplement for international programs.

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INTRODUCTION

MISSION

The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary, peer-review, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Accreditation also assists in the further improvement of the institutions or programs as related to resources invested, processes followed, and results achieved. The monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the ACEN is to provide specialized accreditation for all levels of nursing education and transition-to-practice programs.

Nursing Education Accreditation:

The ACEN is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) as a specialized accrediting agency for nursing education programs located in the United States and its territories.

The ACEN is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for nursing education programs in the United States and its territories as well as for international nursing education programs.

The ACEN accredits all types of nursing programs, including clinical doctorate/DNP specialist certificate, master's/post-master's certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical nursing programs.

The ACEN accredits nursing programs in a variety of postsecondary and higher education settings, including vocational-technical schools, hospitals, professional schools, community/technical colleges, and colleges/universities.

The ACEN serves as a Title IV-HEA Gatekeeper for some practical nursing programs and hospital-based programs eligible to participate in financial aid programs administered by the USDE or other federal agencies.

Transition-to-Practice Accreditation:

The ANCC Pathway to Excellence® and Magnet® programs have determined that the ACEN Transition-to-Practice accreditation is a nationally recognized accreditation per their guidelines.

The ACEN accredits non-credit transition-to-practice programs at all levels of nursing licensure.

The ACEN accredits non-credit transition-to-practice programs offered by academic institutions (e.g., university, college, career center) and/or healthcare agencies (e.g., hospitals, long-term care).

GOALS

As the leading authority in nursing accreditation, the goal of the ACEN is to be a supportive partner in strengthening the quality of nursing education and transition-to-practice programs through:

- Supporting nursing education and transition-to-practice programs in obtaining and maintaining accreditation
- Promoting peer review
- Advocating for self-regulation
- Fostering quality, equity, access, opportunity, mobility, and preparation for practice, or transition-to-practice, at all levels of nursing preparation
- Developing standards and criteria for accreditation

RECOGNITION

The ACEN is recognized as the accrediting body for all types of nursing education by:

- United States Department of Education (USDE)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

National, regional, and specialized accreditors that oversee federal funding eligibility must be reviewed by the USDE to ensure that the accrediting body meets specific standards established by Congress. The Secretary of Education for the USDE is charged with review of accrediting bodies and providing recognition to those accrediting agencies that meet the Secretary of Education's criteria. Students in institutions or programs accredited by a USDE-recognized agency may be eligible for federal financial aid assistance and other needed resources.

CHEA is a national and international advocate for academic quality through accreditation. The ACEN is recognized by CHEA as a programmatic accreditor for all levels of nursing education in the United States and its territories, as well as internationally, and inclusive of those programs delivered via distance education.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

ACEN accreditation is a voluntary peer-review process intended to enhance quality improvement in nursing education. Accreditation benefits students, faculty, and the community.

- Student benefits:
 - Provides useful information for students' career and education decision-making
 - Enables student eligibility for funding support from federal and state agencies, and foundations
 - Facilitates transfer of credits
 - Is required for admission to many undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, as well as by some state regulatory agencies or employers
 - May be required for licensure/certification
 - May be required by employer for employment as a nurse (e.g., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Military)
- Faculty benefits:
 - Heightens faculty members' and administrators' awareness and responsiveness to program quality
 - Offers professional development opportunity and validation
- Community benefits:
 - Assists employers seeking graduates who are competent practitioners

PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION

The ACEN accreditation program is founded on the belief that specialized accreditation contributes to the centrality of nursing for the public good and provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self-assessment, planning, and improvement. Accreditation indicates to the public and to the educational community that a nursing program has clear and appropriate educational objectives and is working to achieve these objectives. Emphasis is placed upon the entire nursing program and its compliance with established standards and criteria in the context of its mission/philosophy as well as current and future nursing practice.

Accrediting agencies share responsibility with their communities of interest for the development of accreditation standards and criteria, policies, and procedures for participation in accreditation and review of accreditation processes. The ACEN supports the continuation and strengthening of voluntary specialized accreditation by peers as a principal means of public accountability and ongoing improvement. Specialized accreditation sets standards for programs and ensures, through the self-study process and accreditation review process, the promotion of effective education and program improvement.

Standards and criteria for accreditation, materials that document compliance, policies, and procedures are based on principles widely accepted and tested in general and professional education. All those involved in the process must be aware of current developments in education and nursing. They must also be aware of the effectiveness of the current standards, criteria, policies, procedures, and the evidence of need for change. A systematic ongoing review of all components of the accreditation process is essential to ensure an up-to-date, reliable, and valid accrediting process.

The ACEN and the HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION

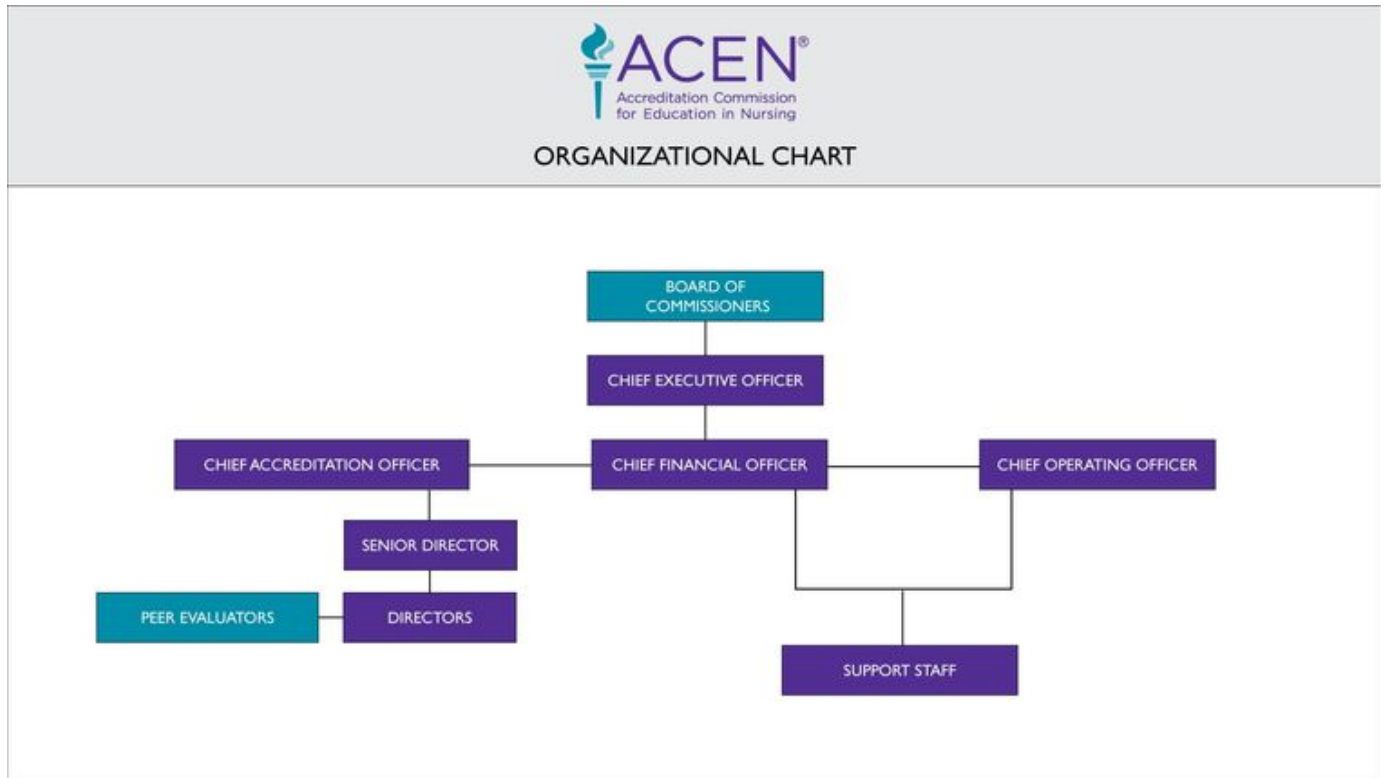
The ACEN has a long-standing history with nursing accreditation in the United States. It was the first nursing accrediting agency. Please see the ACEN website for additional information about the history of the ACEN.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Initial and continuing accreditation site visits, including domestic and international, of approximately 200-250 nursing programs per year
- Continuous monitoring of more than 1300 nursing education programs per year
- [ACEN Directory of Accredited Nursing Programs](#)
- Continuing education and professional development:
 - o Forums
 - o Workshops
 - o Conferences
 - o Webinars
- Candidacy Mentoring Program
- Advisory Review Program
- Observer Program
- Mentoring by ACEN Directors
- ACEN Accreditation Manual
 - o General Information
 - o Policies
 - o ACEN Standards and Criteria/Glossary
 - o International Supplement

- *Bridges* and *Signal Flame* (electronic newsletters)
- Report to Constituents
- [ACEN website](#)

ACEN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



THE COMMISSION

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

The ACEN is governed by a [17-member Board of Commissioners](#) (BOC). The Commissioners are elected by the representatives of ACEN-accredited nursing programs. The legal basis for the foundation and structure of the Commission is outlined in the [Bylaws](#) and the Articles of Incorporation. The ACEN is incorporated under the laws of the state of New York.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- Eleven Commissioners are nurse educators representing ACEN-accredited programs, three Commissioners represent the public, and three Commissioners represent nursing service.
- Commissioners are diversified and ensure balanced representation from across identified constituencies insofar as possible.
- The BOC sets accreditation policy and makes accreditation, administrative, budget, and policy decisions.
- Decision of accreditation status is made by the Commissioners based on review of program materials including, but not limited to, the Self-Study Report/Focused Visit Report/Follow-Up Report, the Site Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report from peer reviewers, the program's response to the site visit report, and the recommendation of the ERP.
- No current governor, current officer, or current or former employee of the NLN or its subsidiaries, or current employee of the ACEN, may serve as a Commissioner.

Names, credentials, and affiliations of [Commissioners](#) are available online.

ACEN STAFF

The ACEN staff maintain operational functions of the office and support the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Board of Commissioners, and nursing programs. Names and credentials of [staff](#) are available online.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY OF POSTSECONDARY AND HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS IN NURSING



ACEN DEFINITION OF QUALITY

The core values of accreditation emphasize learning, community, responsibility, integrity, value, quality, and continuous improvement through reflection and analysis.

Peer review is a long-established and effective process that promotes institutions and academic programs embracing quality assurance and quality improvement to become stronger. The process also betters institutions and programs by setting standards of educational quality. It is used by the ACEN to help determine which programs meet or exceed established standards and criteria for educational quality in nursing education. The ACEN peer evaluators are familiar with contemporary practices in various program types and receive training from the ACEN to make informed recommendations about a program's compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

Quality in nursing education ensures high levels of opportunity for student learning and achievement. Accreditation is an affirmation of values central to postsecondary and higher education; this includes appropriate mission, organizational structures, processes, functions, resources aligned with core values, collegiality, and continuous improvement.

UNDERSTANDING ACEN STANDARDS AND CRITERIA IN THE EVALUATION OF NURSING EDUCATION UNITS

Each certificate, diploma, or degree has an identifiable, discrete set of specific end-of-program student learning outcomes and program outcomes. Postsecondary and higher education provide for the development of the learners' ability to think for themselves, master analytical problem-solving, apply scientific knowledge, and make value judgments within the context of the specific program type. Thus, education requires a broad academic orientation, depth and breadth of intellectual knowledge, and skills translated into competencies to fulfill the nursing's functions in all types of practice settings.

Standard – Agreed-upon expectations to measure quantity, extent, value, and educational quality.

Criteria – Statements that identify the elements that need to be examined in evaluation of a Standard.

The current version of the ACEN Standards and Criteria become effective on the date specified by the Board of Commissioners. Programs scheduled for review within 12 months of the ACEN Standards and Criteria effective date may elect to use the current or former version of the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

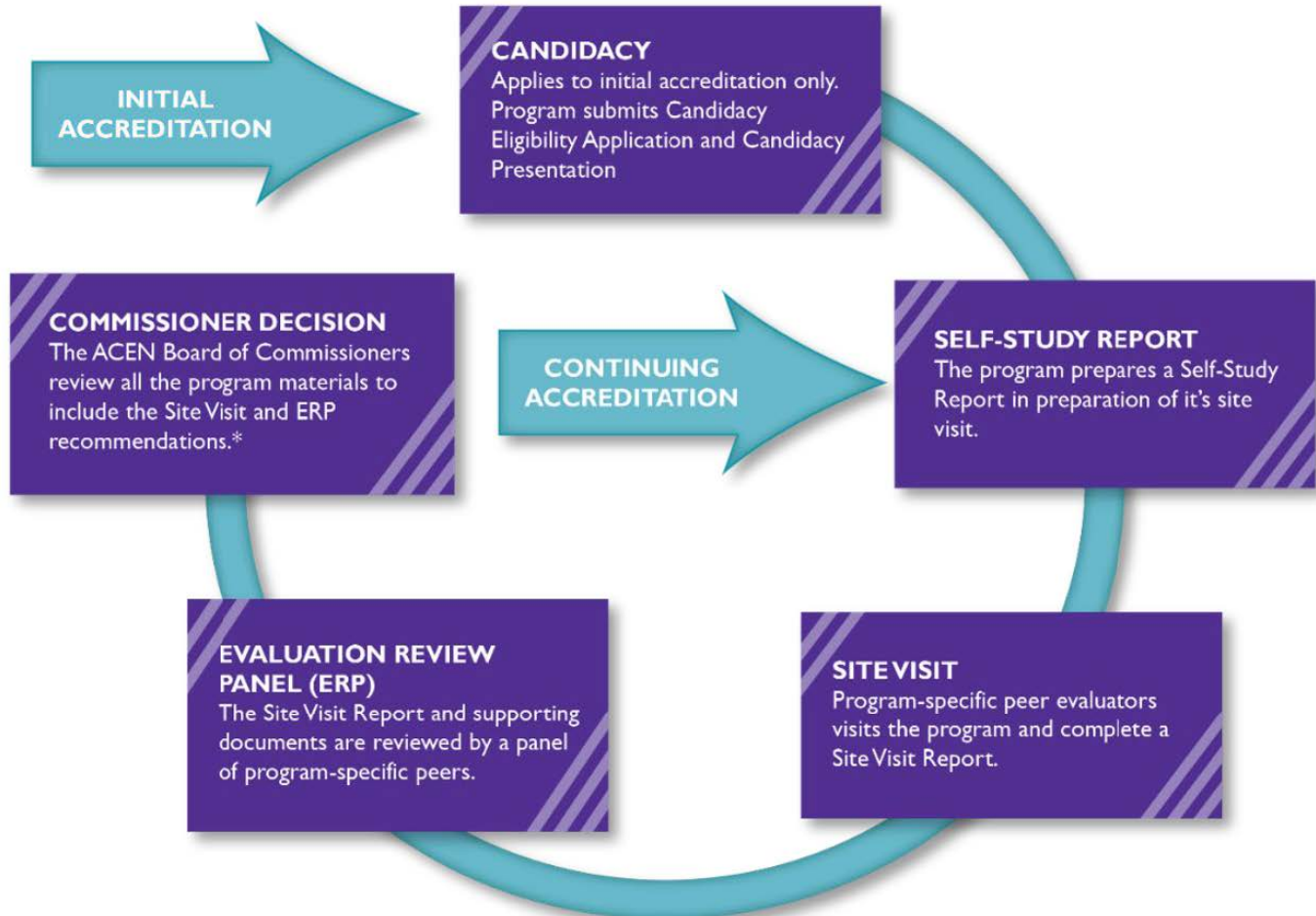
ACCREDITATION PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

ACCREDITATION CYCLES

The ACEN has two accreditation cycles annually: the *Fall Cycle: July 1 to December 31* and the *Spring Cycle: January 1 to June 30*. During each of the cycles there is about a 10-week period during which accreditation site visits are scheduled.

OVERVIEW OF THE INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The ACEN accreditation process includes the following primary steps:



**An Appeal Committee may be convened only when initial or continuing accreditation is denied by the Board of Commissioners*

Programs seeking initial accreditation with the ACEN must start with the Candidacy process. The ACEN process for nursing programs seeking initial accreditation, after achieving Candidate status or continuing accreditation, is a comprehensive four-step process starting with the program's self-reflection regarding its compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria as presented in its Self-Study Report. The second step is the site visit of the program resulting in the peer evaluators documenting their assessment and accreditation recommendation regarding the program's compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria in the Site Visit Report. In the third step, a program-specific Evaluation Review Panel (ERP) examines the reports written by, and about, the program (Self-Study Report and Site Visit Report) and the program's response to the site visit report. The panel then reaches their own independent judgement and accreditation recommendation regarding the program's compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The final step is a review of the process by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. While considering the peer evaluators' judgement and accreditation recommendations, the Commissioners also reach their own independent judgement regarding the program's compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria and make an accreditation decision.

PLANNING FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION - CANDIDACY PROCESS

Nursing programs currently not accredited with the ACEN should contact the ACEN. Under the guidance of an ACEN Director, the nurse administrator, the program faculty, and administrative officers of the governing organization determine when the program is ready to apply for candidacy and the initial accreditation site visit. The decision should be based on an in-depth self-study of the program in relation to the ACEN Standards and Criteria, ACEN policies, and required ACEN processes and timelines.

A nursing program seeking initial accreditation must apply for Candidacy. A nursing program offered by a single governing organization, or a nursing program offered by multiple governing organizations that have formed a consortium may be eligible for ACEN accreditation. If a consortium seeks accreditation, all governing organizations within the consortium must offer the same program type leading to an authorized degree or certificate/diploma.

1. All governing organizations within the consortium must meet approval and accreditation requirements as stated by the ACEN; see [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial and Continuing Accreditation](#).
2. The consortial nursing program must meet approval requirements as stated by the ACEN; see [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial and Continuing Accreditation](#).
3. The consortial nursing program must meet the ACEN definition for being a single nursing program; see [ACEN Glossary](#).

Candidate status is granted after the ACEN staff review the nursing program’s Candidacy Presentation to determine the program’s potential to achieve ACEN Accreditation. Programs applying for initial accreditation will be assigned an ACEN Director as their mentor once they have begun the Candidacy process. A program seeking accreditation must:

1. Complete the [Candidacy Eligibility Application](#). After eligibility has been confirmed, submit payment for the required fee. See [Schedule of Fees](#).
2. After eligibility has been confirmed and within the designated timeframe, submit a [Candidacy Presentation](#) based upon the guidelines.

NOTE: The Candidacy process differs for international nursing programs. Information for international programs regarding the Candidacy process is available in the [Supplement of International Programs](#).

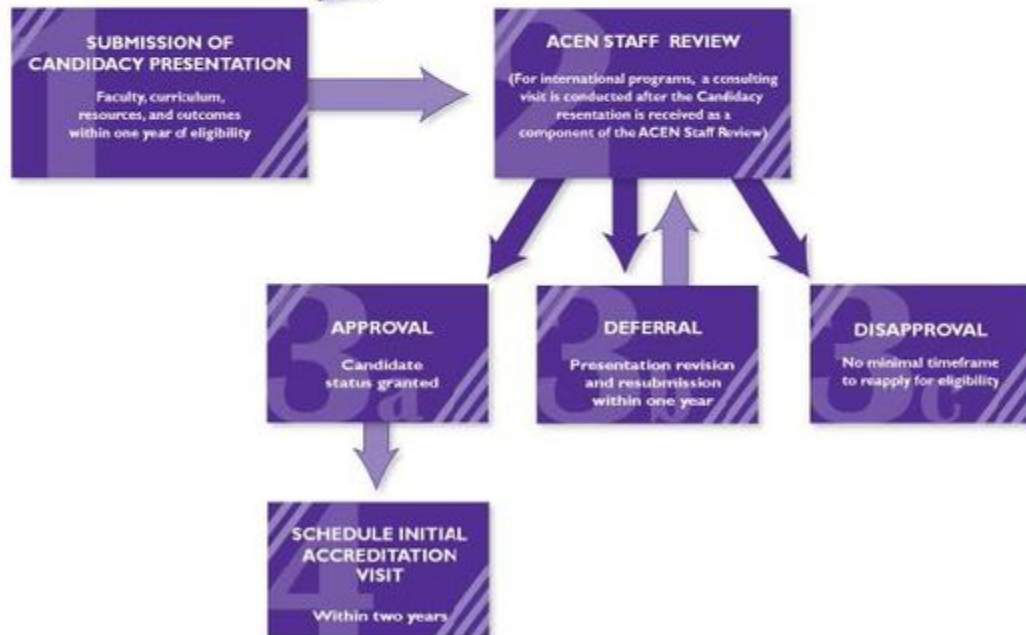
The Candidacy Presentation is reviewed by the ACEN staff. Applicants are notified if they are approved for Candidacy, are deferred, or are disapproved. Approval for Candidacy is granted when the nursing program (a) demonstrates it is currently compliant with the requirements of the Candidacy Presentation and Candidacy process or (b) demonstrates an ability to be compliant with the requirements during the Candidacy period. A program may also be deferred or disapproved. See [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#).

An overview of the **Candidacy process**:

Eligibility Process



Candidacy Process



Programs that achieve Candidate status must publicly disclose its Candidate status. See [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#).

If a program's Candidacy expires prior to scheduling an initial accreditation site visit, then the program must restart the candidacy process to renew its candidate status. The Candidacy process can be restarted at any time after either being disapproved, withdrawn, or when the program's Candidacy has expired.

Each governing organization/nursing program making a Candidacy Presentation to the ACEN or having already been granted Candidacy agrees to certain requirements concerning financial obligation, choice of law, jurisdiction, and venue. See [Policy #28 Litigation](#) and [Policy #38 Arbitration](#).

Programs approved for Candidacy by the ACEN *must* notify the ACEN of changes that occur in the program during the entire Candidacy process; eligibility for both Candidacy and Candidate status are based upon the information provided in the [Candidacy Eligibility Application](#) or the Candidacy Presentation. Changes that occur can affect the program's eligibility to pursue and/or achieve initial accreditation. See ACEN [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#) and [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial or Continuing Accreditation](#).

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Once Candidacy status has been achieved, the chief executive officer of the governing organization and the nurse administrator must authorize the scheduling/hosting of the initial accreditation site visit using the [Site Visit Request Form](#).

A nursing program may discontinue the initial accreditation process at any time. A program seeking initial accreditation can also withdraw from the process at any point prior to being reviewed by the Board of Commissioners.

NOTE:

Upon granting of initial accreditation by the ACEN Board of Commissioners, the effective date of initial accreditation is the date on which the nursing program was approved by the ACEN as a Candidate program that concluded in the Board of Commissioners granting initial accreditation. **Accreditation is not retroactive for students who graduated prior to the program achieving a Candidate status with the ACEN.** See [ACEN Policy #34](#).

In order for the ACEN to properly discharge its responsibilities to the U.S. Department of Education pursuant to 34 CFR Section 602.28 and per [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial or Continuing Accreditation](#), an applicant for candidacy must disclose and certify that neither the governing organization nor the nursing program is the subject of certain circumstances.

The program will be required to disclose and certify this information at the time that the *Official Authorization for Candidacy Process Form* is signed and again when the program applies for the initial accreditation site visit. Information submitted by the program will be kept confidential and will only be utilized by the ACEN in its report to the USDE as required. The information provided by the governing organization/nursing program will not be utilized in determining the program's candidacy or its initial accreditation with the ACEN. The achievement of a Candidate status as well as achieving initial accreditation will be based upon the program's ability to demonstrate compliance with the current ACEN Standards and Criteria.

CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Planning for continuing accreditation is an ongoing process. A program must be visited and re-evaluated at specified intervals to ensure continuing compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The ACEN staff will notify the program of a pending visit in advance and when dates for the continuing accreditation site visit are scheduled in consultation with the nurse administrator, as the program must be in full operation during the visit.

Official authorization to conduct the ACEN accreditation process is submitted by the nurse administrator for the nursing program. The [Site Visit Request Form](#) is available on the ACEN website for the program to complete approximately 12-18 months before the visit is to take place.

If an ACEN-accredited program seeks to delay, advance, or reschedule a visit, refer to [Policy #6 Delay/Advancement of Continuing Accreditation Visit](#). If an ACEN-accredited program seeks to voluntarily withdraw from ACEN accreditation, refer to [Policy #7 Voluntary Withdrawal from ACEN Accreditation](#).

Focused Visit Reports and Follow-Up Reports

A Focused Visit Report is authorized by the ACEN Board of Commissioners to review significant accreditation-related information disclosed about a program as a result of a:

- Substantive change;
- Information revealed about a program between periods of scheduled review;
- Information received from the governing organization's accrediting body related to an adverse action;
- Information received from the program's state regulatory agency for nursing related to a change in its status;
- Information revealed by a program during the Evaluation Review Panel process;
- Information received from the U.S. Department of Education regarding a program's compliance responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act such as information related to a program's most recent student loan default rates, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that may be provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

A Follow-up Report is a report prepared by a program addressing the Standard(s) for which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance during the program's previous review by the ACEN Board of Commissioners.

ASSISTANCE FOR INITIAL OR CONTINUING EDUCATION

The ACEN Directors are available to assist programs preparing for an initial or continuing accreditation site visit. The ACEN website also provides a wide variety of online resources for programs, including, but not limited to, the *ACEN Accreditation Manual*, the *ACEN Glossary*, the Site Visit Request form, and the ACEN 2023 Guidelines. These guidelines provide details regarding preparation of the Self-Study Report and for the site visit. Additionally, if applicable, the guidelines also include details regarding preparation of a Follow-Up Report and a Follow-Up Visit. The guidelines will also include details on reporting Substantive Changes and, if applicable, preparation of the Focused Visit Report.

Continuing education is offered to provide program faculty and leaders information about the accreditation processes and details regarding the preparation of the Self-Study Report. All programs seeking initial and continuing accreditation are encouraged to participate in these offerings. See the [ACEN website](#) for additional information.

Advisory Review is an opportunity for an ACEN-accredited program to receive feedback from an assigned ACEN Director regarding ACEN Accreditation. Reviews may include, but are not limited to, a review of the accreditation process, assistance with curriculum, assistance with assessment processes, and a review of draft program documents in preparation for a continuing accreditation site visit. Examples of documents that a Director could provide feedback include a portion(s) of the Self-Study Report, faculty profile table, or systematic plan of evaluation. This is an optional resource for currently accredited programs and is not a requirement for continuing accreditation. Director feedback indicates the staff member's best judgment but does not guarantee that the Board of Commissioners will determine that the program complies with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. An Advisory Review may be conducted by videoconference or in-person review. Additional information about an Advisory Review is accessible on the ACEN website, including the fee for this optional service.

Observer Experience provides a nursing program with the opportunity to send a program representative on an accreditation site visit as an observer. This typically occurs 12 months to 18 months prior to the program's upcoming accreditation site visit. The Observer Experience enables the program representative to observe every component of the site visit process, including orientation as a peer evaluator and team preparation prior to the site visit. A nursing program submits a request to have an observer on an upcoming visit to a nursing program who has consented to have an observer. The governing organization for the observer is responsible for all costs of the observer in this experience. See [ACEN Policy #32 Observer on Site Visit Team](#) as well as the website for additional information regarding being an observer on a site visit team.

SELF-REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY REPORT

Any program preparing for initial or continuing accreditation must submit a Self-Study Report to demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The Self-Study Report and supporting evidence must be uploaded into the ACEN repository no later than six weeks prior to the date of the initial or continuing accreditation site visit.

The process of self-study represents the combined efforts of the governing organization administrators, nursing program administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other individuals concerned with the nursing program(s). All those associated with the program(s) should participate in the self-study process. Broad participation leads to an understanding of the total program.

The Self-Study Report is a primary document used by the peer evaluators visiting the program, the peer evaluators on the Evaluation Review Panel, and the Board of Commissioners to understand the nursing program.

- The report must be based on the ACEN Standards and Criteria in effect at the time of review and the most recent edition of the ACEN Accreditation Manual.
- Faculty and administrators are responsible for presenting narrative and evidence that clearly demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. Peer evaluators visiting the program will use the Self-Study Report in preparation for their visit to the program.

The [2023 ACEN Guidelines](#) are available to assist programs in preparing for an upcoming initial or continuing accreditation site visit.

THE INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION SITE VISIT

The purpose of the initial or continuing accreditation site visit is to determine the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria by clarifying, verifying, and amplifying the information (narrative/evidence) presented in the Self-Study Report. Based on findings, the peer evaluators visiting the program will make a recommendation relative to the accreditation status of the nursing program(s).

Onsite review of the program by peer evaluators is an essential part of the accreditation process. It provides the program an opportunity to demonstrate and highlight information presented in its Self-Study Report and provides for interaction among peer evaluators and stakeholders: administrators, faculty, students, staff, and the public. In addition, the initial or continuing accreditation site visit provides peer evaluators an opportunity to see the nursing program first-hand. The peer evaluators conduct an independent analysis and make professional judgments on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria; their judgments and accreditation recommendation are documented in the Site Visit Report. These peer evaluators verify congruence between the Self-Study Report and the actual practices of the program so that the peer evaluators on the Evaluation Review Panel and Board of Commissioners have a clear and complete understanding of the program.

Multiple Nursing Programs Within a Nursing Education Unit

The ACEN encourages [single nursing education units](#) offering more than one type of nursing program (clinical doctorate/DNP specialist certificate, master's/post-master's certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and/or practical) to request that all programs be reviewed for continuing or initial accreditation at the same time. The nursing education unit will prepare one Self-Study Report for all the programs and host one site visit for all the programs.

Focused Visits and Follow-Up Visits

A focused site visit may be authorized by the ACEN Board of Commissioners to review significant accreditation-related information disclosed about a program.

A follow-up site visit may be authorized by the ACEN Board of Commissioners to review significant accreditation-related information for which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance during the program's previous review by the ACEN Board of Commissioners.

Coordinated and Combined Site Visits

Coordinated Visit

Coordinated visits typically occur in conjunction with an initial or continuing accreditation visit or sometimes with a follow-up visit to cooperate with other accreditation and/or approval granting agencies. For example, an initial accreditation visit may be coordinated with a state board of nursing. The ACEN welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with other accreditation and approval-granting agencies (e.g., state regulatory agency for nursing). The goal is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload while maximizing outcomes. To arrange a coordinated visit, the nurse administrator initiates the process by submitting a request to the ACEN. The ACEN staff then work with the institutional/program administrators and faculty members to achieve their goal.

For a coordinated site visit, the program prepares materials separately for each agency team. The two teams share an agenda and conduct a site visit that meets each agency's requirements. However, the representative from another agency is not a member of the ACEN site visit team. The ACEN peer evaluators and the other representative may participate jointly in activities such as conferences with faculty, students, and other groups. Many of the activities of the ACEN peer evaluators and the representative will be carried out separately as the purposes of ACEN accreditation may differ from those of other accrediting/approval-granting bodies. At the conclusion of the site visit, each agency writes a report that documents the extent to which the program meets the agency's respective standards and criteria or regulations.

Combined Visit

Follow-Up and focused visits typically occur independently; however, it is possible that a follow-up or focused visit could be combined with a regular continuing site visit. For example:

- A continuing accreditation visit is combined with a follow-up visit
- A continuing accreditation visit is combined with a focused visit

The goal of combining visits is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload. The faculty will prepare a Self-Study Report that addresses all Standards and Criteria for the continuing accreditation visit with an additional emphasis on the non-compliant Standard(s) for the follow-up or the type of substantive change necessitating the focused visit.

Length of the Initial or Continuing Accreditation Site Visit

The initial or continuing accreditation site visit is typically scheduled for a minimum of three days. However, the length depends on several factors, including size and complexity of the nursing program, the number of nursing program types involved, and the locations of the program(s). Correspondence from the ACEN will indicate the inclusive dates of the visit.

Assignment of Peer Evaluators on a Site Visit Team

Each initial or continuing accreditation site visit is conducted by a team of peers representing nurse educators, nurse clinicians and/or administrators with program-specific expertise. The site visit team reviewing a single program typically has three peer evaluators as the team members. Graduate programs offering advanced practice nursing options will have at least one team member with a current advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) background.

The ACEN staff will appoint the team of peer evaluators and notify the nurse administrator in advance of the visit. The nurse administrator should contact the ACEN staff in writing if a possible conflict of interest is identified with a peer evaluator. If a peer evaluator becomes ineligible or is unable to serve, another peer evaluator with comparable qualifications will be appointed.

When creating site visit teams, the ACEN staff takes into consideration assigning peer evaluators with backgrounds that are as similar as reasonably possible to the program being visited, including, but not limited to:

- Program type(s)
- Size of program(s) and governing organization
- State/Country
- Characteristics of the governing organization (public, private, religious affiliation, etc.)

Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson

A peer evaluator is eligible to be a team chairperson for an initial or continuing accreditation site visit after serving on a minimum of three teams as a peer evaluator. Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete additional training prior to chairing a visit. Team chairs assume the usual responsibilities of a team member; however, additional responsibilities include being the team spokesperson, coordinating/planning of the visit in collaboration with the nurse administrator and team members, facilitating meetings and interviews during the visit, and requesting of additional information as appropriate. The team chair is also responsible for the collating and final editing of the team's site visit report to ensure completeness and clarity, and submission of the report within one week following the site visit. The team chair must also provide any report clarifications identified by the ACEN staff after submission and may receive requests for further clarifications prior to the ERP meetings.

Responsibilities of the Team Members

Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete site visitor training prior to participating on a site visit. Team member responsibilities include reviewing program materials in the ACEN Repository, preparing a draft copy of the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report findings for assigned areas, submitting the draft to the team chair one week prior to the site visit, and making a list of findings from the Self-Study Report/Follow-Up Report that require additional verification, clarification, and/or amplification at the time of the site visit. Team

members also collaborate with the team chair and other team members in completing the meetings, interviews, and observations identified on the site visit agenda, and revises the final version of the draft report to submit to the team chair. Team members must also provide any report clarifications identified by the ACEN staff after submission and may receive requests for further clarifications prior to the ERP meetings.

Responsibilities of the Nursing Program

Programs have specific responsibilities before, during, and after the site visit including, but not limited to, providing laptop computers for the team members, if requested by the team, to use throughout the site visit. Also, if needed, access to printing minimally at the campus. The program will need to identify a workroom where the team members can work during the site visit. The program must prepare to upload the report and supporting evidence into the ACEN repository by the due date (six weeks prior to the visit), and any additional evidence requested by peer evaluators. Programs must also ensure that peer evaluators have access to confidential materials and obtaining any necessary written permissions required prior to the site visit (e.g., review of records). Programs for which all, or part, of the curriculum is delivered in a language other than English should make provisions for an interpreter to be present throughout the initial or continuing accreditation site visit and to make certain that **all program documents are available in English** for review by the peer evaluators. Additional specifics about preparing for the site visit will be communicated to the nurse administrator prior to the visit by the ACEN staff and resources will also be available in the [ACEN Repository](#).

Travel Arrangements

See Travel Policy for site visit arrangements for domestic programs and the [Supplement for International Programs](#) for site visit arrangements specific to international programs.

Agenda for the Initial or Continuing Accreditation Site Visit

At least six weeks prior to the scheduled initial or continuing accreditation site visit, a tentative agenda for the site visit is prepared by the nurse administrator and sent to the team. See the *ACEN 2023 Guidelines* for a list of required agenda items and a sample agenda for a site visit. The ACEN 2023 Guidelines also include information such as visiting [Off-Campus Instructional Sites](#) and the use of [Distance Education](#). For programs that use Distance Education, access to the courses should be provided with the Self-Study Report at least six weeks prior to the initial or continuing accreditation visit and continue throughout the visit.

THE SITE VISIT REPORT

The site visit team chair is responsible for presenting an accurate, complete, and well-organized Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report to the ACEN within one week after the conclusion of the site visit. Team members review the final report prior to submission to the ACEN.

ACEN Staff Review

All Site Visit Reports/Follow-Up Visit Reports/Focused Site Visit Reports are reviewed by the ACEN staff. If questions arise, the site visit team is contacted for clarification.

A draft copy of the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report is emailed to the nurse administrator of the nursing program /nursing education unit approximately 6-8 weeks after the conclusion of the visit. The program faculty will have an opportunity to submit a response to the findings including any errors of fact, additional information, or changes since the time of the site visit. The program's report, the Site Visit Report, and the program's response will be reviewed by the Evaluation Review Panel (ERP). The ERP also makes a recommendation about the program's compliance with the Standards and Criteria to the Board of Commissioners. The onsite peer evaluators and Evaluation Review Panel's recommendations regarding compliance with the Accreditation Standards, along with the program's report and Site Visit Report, are forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for review and action. Decision options for the Board of Commissioners are based on ACEN [Policy #4](#). The dates for the Evaluation Review Panel and Board of Commissioners meetings are available on the ACEN website.

EVALUATION REVIEW PANEL

Peer evaluators who have completed three visits as a team member are eligible to become an Evaluation Review Panel (ERP) member. Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete training prior to participating in ERP. The ERP panels are composed of nurse educators, clinicians, and administrators. The role of the ERP is to continue the peer review process, conduct its own independent analysis on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria, make an accreditation recommendation, and to ensure the consistent application of the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The Panel reviews the findings as presented in the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report compared to the Self-Study Report/Follow-Up Report/Focused Visit Report of the program(s) and the program's response. The Panel then makes its recommendation for accreditation status to the Board of Commissioners. The Evaluation Review Panel member may request for additional information/clarification during their review of the materials.

The Evaluation Review Panel also validates the work of the peer evaluators that visited the program and extends it by noting points of agreement and raising any questions where there is disagreement or a lack of clarity exists. The aim is to provide consistency in the findings for the program type. The ERP's findings and recommendation are provided to the Board of Commissioners.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Commissioners has the sole authority to determine the accreditation status of programs. Composed of nurse educators, nursing clinicians/practitioners, administrators, and public members, the Board of Commissioners bases its decisions on its own independent analysis and professional judgment on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The Board of Commissioners also considers the previous peer evaluators' judgement and recommendations, as well as the consistent application of the ACEN Standards and Criteria within and across all program types. The entire Board of Commissioners makes the accreditation decision at a regularly scheduled spring and fall meeting (typically in April and September). The decision is based on the program's report, the Site Visit Report, the program's response,

and the ERP findings and recommendation. In cases where accreditation is denied, programs have the opportunity to present their case in an impartial hearing before an independent [Appeal Committee](#) per [Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action](#).

To assist the nursing program in future planning, the nurse administrator receives a copy of the Board of Commissioners' decision letter.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR SERVING AS A PEER EVALUATOR

Peer evaluators participate as site visitors (team members and team chairs) and Evaluation Review Panelists who make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. Peer evaluators are knowledgeable about common, contemporary, and best practices within the various program types, appropriate curricula, and conventions as well as current trends in healthcare, nursing education, and/or nursing practice.

Eligibility to serve as an ACEN peer evaluator is dependent on requirements located in ACEN [Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest](#) and ACEN [Policy #2 Representation on the Site Visit Teams, Evaluation Review Panels, and Board of Commissioners](#). Additionally, educational and experiential requirements for becoming a Peer Evaluator are located on the [ACEN website](#).

Appeal Committee Members

Selection

Members of the Appeal Committee must have knowledge of and experience with the peer-review process.

Appointment

The Appeal Committee consists of individuals selected from a Board of Commissioners-approved list of the individuals qualified to serve as members of the Appeal Committee. See [Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action](#). A list of the individuals who have been appointed to the Appeal Committee Members is accessible on the [ACEN website](#).

Arbitrators

Selection

The ACEN shall maintain a roster of arbitrators.

Appointment and Preparation

A list of the individuals who are Arbitrators is accessible on the ACEN website. See [Policy #38 Arbitration](#).

Accreditation Manual Supplement for International Programs

POSITION STATEMENT ON ACCREDITATION OF INTERNATIONAL NURSING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The ACEN is committed to quality in all types of nursing education programs and encourages self-evaluation, peer review, and the promotion of educational equity, access, and mobility through the functions of accreditation. Recognizing that accreditation is one way of enhancing the quality of nursing education and is a way to facilitate the nursing profession being the best and strongest it can be worldwide, the ACEN welcomes nursing programs outside the United States and U.S. Territories to pursue international nursing accreditation.

The ACEN asserts that accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental entities recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. The ACEN acknowledges that nursing education programs located outside of the United States and its Territories can benefit from adherence to best practices and generally accepted guidelines for nursing education incorporated in the ACEN Standards and Criteria. To fulfill its mission to support the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public, the ACEN seeks to broaden the impact of accreditation to encompass nursing education programs across the globe.

Therefore, in a spirit of cooperation, openness, and mutual respect consistent with its organizational values, the ACEN extends accreditation and related services to international nursing education programs.

Original Statement: February 2010; Revised August 2018, Revised August 2022

ELIGIBILITY

All nursing education programs accredited by the ACEN must meet the following eligibility requirements as listed below:

- Placement within a governing organization that is accredited by an approved accrediting agency or holds unconditional approval by the appropriate regulatory agency that has legal authority for education programs within the country.
- Placement within a governing organization that is authorized to grant the credential awarded at the completion of the program.

Nursing education programs located outside the United States and its Territories must meet the following additional eligibility requirements.

- Program faculty and students must speak and understand English. The program must produce all documents and written materials required for the accreditation processes in English.
- The region in which the program is located must be safe for travel as identified by the

U.S. State Department at the time of the travel for the ACEN peer evaluators and/or staff.

- Program must agree to host a minimum of two onsite visits, including a mandatory onsite Advisory Visit for International Candidacy and the onsite initial accreditation visit. [Note: Nursing education units seeking accreditation for a second nursing program have the option of declining the Advisory Visit for International Candidacy as a component of the candidacy process.]
- Program has financial resources adequate to meet all fiscal responsibilities related to the ACEN accreditation processes including International Candidacy Eligibility Application, Candidacy, and two onsite visits.
- The nursing program must establish and provide documentation that it has obtained requisite governmental and regulatory approval to seek ACEN accreditation, if required.

INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Nursing programs located outside the U.S. considering accreditation by the ACEN should contact the ACEN to begin the process. International programs must complete and submit the International Candidacy Eligibility Application to determine their eligibility for International Candidacy. The International Candidacy Eligibility Application must be accompanied by an International Candidacy Eligibility Application fee.

An ACEN determines a program's eligibility and suitability for ACEN accreditation by reviewing the *International Candidacy Eligibility Application*. Possible results of the review include the following:

1. The program is deemed eligible to pursue International Candidacy.
2. The program is asked to submit additional information/clarification.
3. The program is deemed ineligible to pursue International Candidacy and will be withdrawn from the process.

International nursing education programs determined to be eligible for International Candidacy will be scheduled for a mandatory onsite Advisory Visit for International Candidacy. In preparation for the onsite Advisory Visit for International Candidacy, programs will submit an International Candidacy Presentation, which will be provided to site visitors a minimum of six weeks prior to the onsite visit.

The International Candidacy Presentation will address the same selected Criteria as other programs pursuing Candidacy with the ACEN. See the [Candidacy Presentation – Written Instructions](#).

The onsite Advisory Visit for International Candidacy will be conducted by one or two ACEN representatives. The purpose of the onsite International Candidacy Advisory Visit is to determine whether a program may proceed with the Candidacy process. Following the onsite International Candidacy Advisory Visit, an International Candidacy Advisory Visit Report is submitted by the reviewers.

Based on the recommendations of the reviewers in the International Candidacy Advisory Visit Report, the ACEN will take one (1) of the following actions:

1. **Approval of International Candidacy:** The nursing program (a) demonstrated it is currently compliant with the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed or demonstrated the potential to be compliant with the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed within the Candidacy timeframe, and (b) demonstrated the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based upon the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed. Approval of International Candidacy does not guarantee that the program will achieve initial accreditation.
2. **Extension of Time to Achieve Candidacy (Deferral):** The nursing program (a) made an inconsistent presentation to demonstrate it is currently compliant with the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed or made an inconsistent presentation to demonstrate the potential to be compliant with the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed during the Candidacy timeframe, and (b) made an inconsistent presentation to demonstrate the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based upon the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed. The program is advised to complete specified actions/implement specific changes or modifications; the program will need to resubmit the Candidacy Presentation within one year of notification (deferral). To proceed, the program must submit an International Candidacy Presentation Addendum within one year of notification describing how the recommended actions/concerns have been addressed. If the Addendum is approved by the ACEN Directors, International Candidacy is approved with the onsite accreditation visit to be scheduled within the Candidacy timeframe as noted above. If the Addendum is not approved, then the program is disapproved, and the ACEN will withdraw the program from the International Candidacy process.
3. **Disapproval of International Candidacy:** The nursing program (a) did not demonstrate it is currently compliant with the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed or did not demonstrate the potential to be compliant with the ACEN Standards and Criteria the Candidacy timeframe, and (b) did not demonstrate the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based upon the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed. ACEN withdraws the program from the candidacy process. No fees will be refunded if a program is withdrawn.
4. **Program is not eligible:** ACEN withdraws the program from the International Candidacy process. No fees will be refunded if a program is withdrawn.

SELF-REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY REPORT

All programs electing to participate in accreditation activities are required to abide by the policies and procedures as outlined in the [ACEN Accreditation Manual](#).

THE SITE VISIT

(including the International Candidacy Advisory Visit and Accreditation Visits)

The section of the ACEN Accreditation Manual related to the Site Visit applies to all programs located outside the United States and its Territories.

Length of Visit

Advisory Visits for International Candidacy and Accreditation visits for nursing programs located outside the United States and its Territories will be a minimum of five days for a single program. The onsite portion of the visit will be a minimum of three full days. A nursing education unit with more than a single nursing program may require additional days

Assignment of Site Visit Team

Peer evaluators for international programs will be selected from a pool of peer evaluators. The number of peer evaluators will be determined by the ACEN and will be based on the program type(s), length of travel, geographic location, and the complexity of the program(s) (e.g., number of students and faculty, use of distance education, locations, on-ground transportation logistics).

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Team Chair, Team Members, and nursing program as listed in the ACEN Accreditation Manual apply to all nursing programs, including those located outside the United States and its Territories. The following additional responsibilities apply in reference to visit arrangements:

- i** Please note that all international nursing programs must pay all fees associated with the International Candidacy Advisory Visit and the accreditation site visit prior to any visit taking place. If any invoice received from the ACEN is not paid within an acceptable timeframe prior to any visit, the visit will be cancelled. The schedule of fees for international programs is available on the [ACEN website](#).

Area	Responsibility	
	Nursing Education Unit	Peer Evaluator
Travel	Responsible for all travel costs incurred for each peer evaluator; travel will be at business class or higher for each evaluator; International Candidacy Advisory Visit	Responsible for working with the ACEN staff to book airfare in accordance with ACEN

	<p>/Accreditation Site Visit fees and airline travel expenses will be submitted prior to the International Candidacy Advisory Visit /Accreditation Site Visit; additional fees incurred during the International Candidacy Advisory Visit/Accreditation Site Visit will be submitted upon receipt of the invoice</p> <p>Responsible for arranging all local and on-ground transportation during the onsite visits subject to ACEN approval</p>	<p>travel policy (ACEN books international travel for the peer evaluator but works with the peer evaluator to determine the itinerary)</p>
Hotel Accommodations	<p>Responsible for arranging hotel accommodations for reviewers/peer evaluators; accommodations must include a separate, private room for each reviewer/peer evaluator at a hotel pre-approved by ACEN</p> <p>Responsible for directly paying the costs for hotel accommodations; accommodations are subject to ACEN approval</p>	
Food/Beverages	<p>Provide customary food/beverages during the hours that reviewers/peer evaluators are on-campus or visiting clinical settings (e.g., lunch and bottled water); may make arrangements for restaurant(s) at hotel to be included in room arrangements (e.g., breakfast, dinner)</p>	<p>Food not provided by the program during the site visit will be invoiced to the program; reviewers/peer evaluators will be reimbursed for their expenses</p>
Interpreter and Translator Services	<p>Responsible for providing and arranging professional interpreter services during the visit; interpreter and translator services are subject to ACEN approval</p>	
Cultural Sensitivity	<p>Provide information in advance of each visit related to customs, traditions, and expectations related to but not limited to dress and food</p>	<p>Familiarization with local customs and traditions; review cultural packet provided by the ACEN prior to the visit</p> <p>Abide by customs and traditions to the fullest extent possible during the onsite visit</p>

Area	Responsibility	
	Nursing Education Unit	Peer Evaluator
Agenda for Site Visits	<p>Proposed detailed agenda for each visit due to ACEN a minimum of six weeks in advance of the visit</p> <p>Responsible for arranging interviews between reviewer/peer evaluators and the nurse administrator, administrators of the governing organization, faculty, clinical agency representatives, current students, graduates, public, general education faculty, and student services personnel</p> <p>Agenda to include time for reviewer/peer evaluators to take breaks, review program</p>	<p>Team Chair drafts agenda in collaboration with the nurse administrator</p>

	materials/documents as well as travel to/from hotel/college and all scheduled meetings on the agenda.	
Security	Prior to reviewer/peer evaluators' travel, assessment will be made at the time of the visit to determine security needs for reviewers /peer evaluators. Arrangements and associated costs are the responsibility of the nursing program. All security arrangements are subject to ACEN approval.	

Information related to the Candidacy Presentation, Site Visit Report, Evaluation Review Panel, Board of Commissioners, Policies and Procedures, Standards and Criteria, and the glossary apply to all programs seeking accreditation, including those located outside the US or its Territories. Please see the [ACEN Accreditation Manual](#) for information on each of these.