



Policies and Procedures

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Table of Contents

PURPOSE, ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP	2
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF ACCREDITING ACTIVITIES	2
ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY	2
COMMISSIONERS	3
RECORDS.....	3
ACCREDITATION EXPERIENCE.....	3
TEAM SELECTION, QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES	4
OBSERVERS.....	4
DATE OF ACCREDITATION.....	5
PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF ACCREDITATION STATUS.....	5
MISREPRESENTATION	5
GUIDELINES FOR GRANTING EXTENSIONS TO THE REACCREDITING PROCESS.....	5
CONFLICT OF INTEREST	7
SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF POLICIES AND STANDARDS	8
DEFINITIONS:	8
RELEVANT CONSTITUENTS:	8
POLICY FOR THE REVIEW OF ANNUAL REPORTS.....	9
ANNUAL REPORT DEADLINES	10
AGREEMENT TO AVOID CONFLICT OF INTEREST	11
AGREEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	12
COA GUEST AGREEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY.....	13

PURPOSE, ORGANIZATION AND MEMBERSHIP

The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation (COA) is an independent organization; officially incorporated to serve as an independent agency for the sole purpose of accrediting opticianry and ophthalmic laboratory technology programs in the United States and its territories.

The COA accredits two-year opticianry degree programs and one-year ophthalmic laboratory technology certificate programs.

COA fosters excellence in education through the development of standards for assessing educational effectiveness, encourages improvement through continuous evaluation and planning, and assures the educational community, the public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution has clearly defined and appropriate objectives, maintains conditions under which their achievement can be reasonably achieved, and the capacity to sustain them.

COA continually develops these educational standards by which opticianry programs are evaluated based on the skills and knowledge necessary for the profession, conducts program evaluation, and publishes a list of accredited programs that meet the national accreditation standards.

COA can form a body of consultants whose members, to avoid conflict of interest, and will serve neither as on-site evaluators nor commissioners. These consultants, who are selected in accordance with nondiscriminatory practices, represent the fields of ophthalmology, opticianry, optometry, and general education. If an on-site visit is required of these consultants, the expenses will be borne by the program requesting the visit.

COA annual accreditation fees levied on the accredited programs are paid separately from any fees paid to any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization. The COA annual budget is developed and determined by the agency without review by or consultation with any entity or organization.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF ACCREDITING ACTIVITIES

The geographic scope of the accrediting activities of the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation will cover the United States and its territories.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Commissioners periodically review the status of the administrative staff to assure that it is adequate to carry out its accrediting responsibilities effectively and manage its finances effectively.

Each on-site evaluator is selected as a competent and knowledgeable individual, qualified by experienced training, and responsible for on-site evaluation. Excluding the public member of the commission, evaluators must be ABO certified, NCLE certified, or hold a state licensed. Decision-making regarding accreditation status is the responsibility of the Commissioners.

All evaluation, policy, and decision-making activities include representation of educators, practitioners, and the general public.

Clear and effective controls against conflict of interest by COA's board of commissioners, evaluation team members, consultants, administrative staff, and other agency representatives will be adhered to. These will be stated in the *Accreditation Guide for Opticianry* and the *Accreditation Guide for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs*, and review of these controls will be part of the fall meeting agenda each year.

COMMISSIONERS

It is the policy of the Commission to solicit suggestions of the names of individuals who could serve constructively as public members of the Commission and who can represent adequately the general interest of the public. Nominees are secured through notices in industry publications, consumer group publications, and recruitment of Commissioners.

To ensure the public member's ability to serve in an objective and impartial manner in representing the public interest, nominees for this position may not be educators in, or members of the profession of opticianry, or in any way related to the eyecare professions.

RECORDS

The COA office will house complete and accurate records of the last two full accreditation reviews of each program, including on-site evaluation team reports, and program responses to on-site reports, progress reports, annual reports, and any special review conducted by COA between regular reviews, and the program's most recent self-study report, in addition to all accreditation decisions, including all adverse actions.

ACCREDITATION EXPERIENCE

The COA provides technical assistance related to accreditation of programs and establishes policies, evaluates criteria and procedures, and makes evaluative decisions that are accepted

throughout the United States by educators, educational institutions, licensing bodies, practitioners, and employers in the profession of Opticianry, within COA's jurisdiction.

COA advises the applying programs of the procedures necessary to initiate the accreditation or reaccreditation process by supplying a copy of the *Accreditation Guide for Opticianry* or the *Accreditation Guide for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program*.

All information and instructions for preparation and execution of the on-site visit will be included in the *Accreditation Guide for Opticianry Programs*, the *Accreditation for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs*, the *Self Study Report Format for Opticianry Programs*, and the *Self Study Report Format for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs*.

TEAM SELECTION, QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All persons who serve as evaluators are selected in accordance with nondiscriminatory practices on the basis of relevant experience and training. In choosing a team, the Commission draws from a working pool of qualified ophthalmic professionals and ophthalmic educators, and tailors the team to the needs of the program being evaluated.

Each team will have at least one member who is neither a commissioner, nor administrative staff member. In addition, each team will include one evaluator who is (or has been within the last five years) a full-time instructor/professor at a COA accredited program. At least one member will be a commissioner, or a recently retired Commissioner.

COA policy states that an educator who is not affiliated with a COA accredited program cannot serve on an on-site visit as an educator. However, this individual may participate as a professional optician.

Commissioners who attended the most recent on-site for accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation purposes will make a recommendation on accreditation and term of accreditation to the full Commission, but will not, themselves, have a vote on the accreditation decision.

All evaluators will either attend an Evaluator's Workshop or review the workshop materials on the COA website every five years as a review of the on-site policies and procedures.

OBSERVERS

It is the policy of the Commission to participate, whenever feasible, in joint on-site evaluations

with representatives of the state department of education or regional accrediting agency representatives. At the request of the institution, the Commission will invite said organizations to appoint a representative to accompany the on-site evaluation team during the entire course of the visit. Such representatives advise and consult with the Commissioners' evaluators and participate fully in the team's activities.

As part of the Commission's on-site evaluation training program, qualified observers may accompany the on-site team to learn about the on-site evaluation process. Such individuals are present only as observers of the process. Expenses incurred by observers will not be charged to the institution.

DATE OF ACCREDITATION

When a program is approved for initial accreditation by the Commission, the date of accreditation will be the date (first day) of the on-site visit.

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF ACCREDITATION STATUS BY PROGRAM AND/OR INSTITUTION

If a program elects to make a public disclosure of its accreditation status granted by the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation, the program must disclose that status accurately and include the specific academic and/or instructional program(s) covered by that status. Additionally, the name and current address and telephone number of the COA must be included in the disclosure.

MISREPRESENTATION

If a program misrepresents itself by giving misleading information concerning an accreditation status of the program, content of a report of site team visitors, and/or the agency's accrediting actions with respect to the program, the office of the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation will provide for public correction.

GUIDELINES FOR GRANTING EXTENSIONS TO THE REACCREDITING PROCESS

A request for extension of accreditation may be initiated by either the Opticianry Program

Official of the school in question or by the Commission. Extensions may be granted *for one 6-month period*, within the following guidelines:

- A. A school may be granted one extension for cause on written request to the Commission Chairperson. Any further extension will require the approval of the majority of the Commissioners.
- B. The on-site visit must occur within the 6-month extension.
- C. The program requesting an extension must already be fully accredited (not conditional or provisional) and is in good standing with the Commission. By 'good standing' it is understood that:
 1. Annual accreditation fees plus any past-due amount and/or any penalty must be paid in full.
 2. Accepted Annual Reports must have been submitted on a timely basis during the past accrediting period.
- D. A request initiated by the institution must be countersigned by one of the Dean/Division Head/CEO. The request must document a reason such as major changes in curriculum, facilities, or administration that are in progress or imminent. The request must detail why the changes will impact directly on the program's ability to deliver a valid educational experience to the students. The extension should be granted only if the COA Chairperson agrees that accrediting the program as it will be, instead of as it currently is, would be in the best interest of the students. Examples of such changes would be the transfer of the program to a completely new institution, complete reorganization of the entire Opticianry curriculum, or the rebuilding of a majority of the Opticianry facility after fire, flood or earthquake damage.

The Commissioners empower the Commission Chairperson to accept or deny the first petition for a 6-month extension. The program must request an extension no less than three (3) months before the on-site would have been conducted. The Commission Chairperson has the right to refuse the extension but must notify the Program Official of the refusal within six (6) weeks of receipt of the written request. Such denial may be appealed to the full Commission either in written form or in person at a regularly scheduled semi-annual meeting.
- E. The Commissioners empower the Commission Chairperson to make the judgment that the Commission requires up to a 6-month extension for a particular on-site visit. Only schools that qualify under provision C may have their accreditation extended under these guidelines. The Commission Chairperson will notify the Program Official of the proposed extension in writing no less than three (3) months before the proposed site visit.
- F. Exceptions to provisions C, D or E may be made at the discretion of the Commission chairperson, provided the exceptions are within the spirit of the provisions, or provided the situation made the timing of the notifications impossible.
- G. Any further extension, or an extension outside these guidelines that is requested by the Program Official and countersigned by the Dean/Division Head/CEO, must be voted on

by the full Commission. Either the Program Official must document the request to the COA Chairperson in time for the request to be presented at a regularly scheduled semi-annual meeting, or documentation must be submitted to the COA Chairperson for dissemination to the Commissioners for comment and for a mail vote.

- H. The period of accreditation will be retroactive to the original expiration date for any reaffirmation of accreditation where the on-site visit is not held on time, regardless of the reason for or origin of the extension.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

COA has established and implemented guidelines for each member of the decision-making body to avoid conflicts of interest in making decisions. All Commissioners are appointed in accordance with nondiscriminatory practices. A maximum of two commissioners are appointed by the Commission from the public to represent the general interest of the public.

The Commission shall not appoint a person as a member of an on-site evaluation team to evaluate an ophthalmic program with which he/she is affiliated or from which he/she graduated.

To avoid conflict of interest, a consultant will serve neither as an on-site evaluator nor as a Commissioner. Consultants, who are selected in accordance with nondiscriminatory practices, represent the fields of ophthalmology, opticianry, optometry, and general education. The administrative staff is ex-officio and has no vote in any instance.

To avoid any situation that could be construed as suggesting a conflict of interest, no invitations for social functions should be extended to or accepted by evaluators during the site visit. The institution being evaluated shall not extend gifts of any kind to the visiting on-site evaluation team.

The Commission's Conflict of Interest Policy and Agreement of Confidentiality are signed at the beginning of each Commission meeting. Both policies follow herewith.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF POLICIES AND STANDARDS

It is the policy of COA to perform a systematic review of its standards and policies every five years to determine that the standards and policies are valid and reliable measures that assess the quality of opticianry and ophthalmic laboratory programs and graduates of those programs.

DEFINITIONS:

Validity: the degree to which COA standards and policies are true measures of the quality of opticianry and ophthalmic laboratory programs and graduates of those programs.

Reliability: the degree to which COA standards and policies are consistently applied to assessing the quality of opticianry and ophthalmic laboratory programs and graduates of those programs.

RELEVANT CONSTITUENTS:

Constituents in the formal review process may include:

- Graduates of COA accredited programs,
- Employers of graduates,
- Directors and faculty of COA accredited schools,
- Directors and faculty of non-accredited Opticianry programs,
- Eyecare professionals including optometrists and ophthalmologists,
- COA on-site evaluators,
- Licensing board members,
- Professional Opticianry organizations, and
- Certifying bodies (ABO, NCLE)

The methods to assure participation of constituent parties may include:

- Open *Essentials* hearings,
- Newsletters,
- Electronic media, Web page, and
- Public notice.

POLICY FOR THE REVIEW OF ANNUAL REPORTS

The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation (COA) requires two commissioners (readers) to review each annual report prior to the semi-annual meeting. This policy supports a more equitable, consistent, and collaborative decision-making process. If differing opinions arise between readers, they will engage in discussion and reach a more informed consensus, enhancing the reliability of the decision. Additionally, the involvement of two readers promotes a more consistent level of scrutiny across all reports, as it reduces the impact of individual variations in time or approach. This ensures that every program is evaluated with the same thoroughness, regardless of the reader's background or personal approach to the task. The inclusion of multiple readers also fosters greater accountability, ensuring that no single individual bears sole responsibility for a decision that could have significant consequences for a program's accreditation status.

In summary, the policy of requiring two readers per report helps mitigate the risks of inconsistent evaluations due to differing levels of expertise, time spent, and interpretation of the standards.

Review process:

1. Two Commissioners (readers) will be assigned to each report.
2. The first reader is the lead and will write up the review and provide it to the second reader for review.
3. The second reader will review the annual report and review, and discuss any areas of misalignment.
4. If there are recommendations that are not agreed upon, they will be taken to the full Commission for discussion prior to voting.
5. The first reader will present the review to the full board at the semi-annual meeting.
6. If the first reader is not available to attend the meeting, the second reader will be able to provide the summary on their behalf.

The individual responsible for reporting on that program's annual report will be selected as follows:

- a. the Chairperson of the last on site,
- b. the commissioner of the last on site, if not the Chairperson,
- c. an appointee in attendance replacing (a) or (b) appointed by the Chairperson

ANNUAL REPORT DEADLINES

Each program will owe the annual report by the spring or fall deadline as listed below.

For review at Spring COA Semi-annual meeting

Deadline to COA office: February 15

Broward College
Camden County College
College of Southern Nevada
Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology
Hillsborough College
New York City College of Technology
Raritan Valley Community College
SUNY Erie Community College

For review at Fall COA Semi-annual meeting

Deadline to COA office: September 15

Connecticut State Community College - Middlesex
Durham Technical Community College
Essex County College
Miami Dade Community College
Reynolds Community College
Roane State Community College
Southwestern Community College
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
Tri-Service Optician School

AGREEMENT TO AVOID CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I, the undersigned, hereby understand and agree that to avoid any conflict of interest or appearance thereof, in fulfilling my duties as a Commissioner, I will not participate in any decision or discussion that pertains to any ophthalmic educational program that I have attended, taught at or participated as a member of its Advisory Committee. During said discussions, I will voluntarily excuse myself from this meeting.

Additionally, as a Commissioner I understand that I may discuss COA accredited programs, program faculty, and on-site evaluation findings among the Commissioners; however, those conversations should be limited to instances where those discussions would benefit the school programs, the school faculty, the Commission, or the field of Opticianry in general. Under no circumstances may I use such information for any other purpose.

I understand that my signature constitutes binding acceptance of the aforementioned commitments.

Name Printed

Signature

Date

AGREEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, the undersigned, hereby agree and understand that due to my position with the COA as a Commissioner that I:

1. Shall not make copies and/or distribute any information related to COA accredited programs.
2. Shall not reveal confidential examination information or statistics to include reliability, validity, or pass-fail rates.
3. Shall not disclose confidential information related to complaints against programs, complaints against COA, appeals and other actions deliberated by COA committees and/or Commissioners.
4. Shall not disclose any written or oral information that has been identified as being confidential.
5. Shall not forward any written communication or documentation in hard copy or electronic format without written permission of the COA Director of Accreditation or Chairperson.

I understand that my signature constitutes binding acceptance of these conditions. Executive Committee may make exceptions to this agreement upon prior approval.

Name Printed

Signature

Date

COA GUEST AGREEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, the undersigned, hereby agree and understand that due to my position with the COA as a guest that I:

1. Shall not make copies and/or distribute any information related to COA accredited programs.
2. Shall not reveal confidential examination information, statistics to include reliability, validity, or pass/fail rates.
3. Shall not disclose confidential information related to complaints against programs, complaints against COA, appeals and other actions deliberated by COA committees and/or Commissioners.
4. Shall not disclose any written or oral information that has been identified as being confidential.

I understand that my signature constitutes binding acceptance of these conditions. The Chairperson may make an exception to this agreement upon prior approval.

Name Printed

Signature

Date