

# ACEN Accreditation Manual

## SUPPLEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

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**Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing**  
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## **Position Statement on Accreditation of International Nursing Education Programs**

ACEN is committed to excellence in nursing education programs and believes that rigorous self-evaluation, peer review, and the promotion of educational equity, access, and mobility are essential to advancing the profession. Accreditation serves as a powerful mechanism for strengthening nursing education and, ultimately, nursing practice worldwide. ACEN welcomes nursing education programs outside the United States and its Territories to pursue international nursing accreditation.

ACEN affirms that accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory process through which non-governmental entities recognize educational institutions or programs that meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Nursing education programs located outside of the United States and its Territories benefit from engagement with the best practices supported by evidence and widely recognized guidelines for nursing education reflected in the ACEN Standards and Criteria. In fulfillment of its mission to support the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public, ACEN is dedicated to broadening the reach and impact of accreditation to serve nursing education programs across the globe.

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

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## **Benefits of ACEN Accreditation for International Nursing Education Programs**

Pursuing ACEN accreditation is a meaningful investment in the quality, credibility, and continuous improvement of your nursing education program. The following are key benefits of ACEN accreditation for international nursing education programs:

### **Validate Educational Quality**

ACEN accreditation provides independent, external validation of your nursing education program. It confirms that your program meets rigorous, internationally recognized standards for educational quality. The process is a peer review, conducted by nurse educators for nurse educators. This means evaluators bring professional judgment, expertise in nursing education, and practical understanding of nursing practice to every evaluation. Accreditation shows students, employers, regulatory bodies, and the public that your program has been thoroughly reviewed. It confirms that your program meets or exceeds established benchmarks for quality in nursing education.

### **Strengthen Programs Through Ongoing Self-Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement**

The accreditation process guides program faculty through a structured, evidence-based self-evaluation that identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement. Nursing education programs consistently report that the self-study process itself, even before the peer review, leads to meaningful enhancements in curriculum, assessment, and program outcomes. ACEN accreditation is an ongoing process, not a single event. It establishes a framework for ongoing evaluation and improvement, building sustainable processes that support sustained program excellence.

### **Enhance Graduate Competitiveness**

Graduates of an ACEN-accredited nursing education program are recognized as having completed a program of study that meets quality standards based on evidence-based practices. This distinction can enhance graduate competitiveness in the global nursing workforce and support graduates seeking employment or advanced education opportunities internationally.

### **Demonstrate Accountability to Stakeholders**

Accreditation demonstrates your nursing education program's commitment to transparency and accountability to students, families, employers, regulatory authorities, and the populations your program serves. Published program outcomes data and adherence to accreditation standards provide stakeholders with confidence in the quality of your program.

### **Access a Global Community of Practice**

ACEN-accredited programs join a network of nursing education programs committed to continuous quality improvement. Accreditation connects your program to a broader community of nurse educators, providing opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and engagement with current best practices in nursing education worldwide. ACEN accreditation empowers international nursing education programs to demonstrate educational quality, strengthen outcomes, and prepare graduates to meet the demands of a global nursing workforce.

## Overview

- Readiness Assessment
- Eligibility and Candidacy Process
  - Establishing Eligibility
  - Candidacy Presentation and Onsite Visit
  - Self-Study Report and Initial Onsite Visit
- Program Responsibilities for Onsite Visits

## Readiness Assessment

### Self-Evaluation

Before pursuing ACEN accreditation, program faculty and administrators should evaluate the nursing education program's readiness by reviewing the [2023 ACEN Standards and Criteria](#) and assessing the program's alignment with ACEN's expectations for educational quality as well as the [ACEN Glossary](#) to assist with understanding ACEN terminology.

To help programs better understand ACEN accreditation standards and processes, the ACEN Directors have developed the following online [ACEN Academy e-Courses](#):

- Partnering for Excellence: An Intro to ACEN Accreditation
- From Eligibility to Candidacy: The ACEN International Accreditation Journey
- Foundations of ACEN Accreditation: 2023 Standards and Criteria

Faculty are encouraged to take advantage of these professional development e-courses. Two introductory courses are available at no cost, while the more comprehensive Foundations of ACEN Accreditation: 2023 Standards and Criteria course requires a registration fee.

### Financial Commitment

Programs must also consider the financial commitment associated with pursuing ACEN accreditation. The current fee schedule is available on the ACEN website: [Schedule of Fees](#). Fees include those associated with the Eligibility and Candidacy processes, initial accreditation, and annual accreditation for accredited programs.

Because ACEN values the rigor and benefits of peer reviewer-conducted onsite accreditation visits, all programs seeking ACEN accreditation, whether domestic or international, must be prepared for the associated costs. The program must have sufficient financial resources to meet all fiscal responsibilities related to the ACEN accreditation processes. These costs include a scheduling fee for each site visit and fees for each peer evaluator, including [travel/transportation and hotel costs](#). For international programs, this includes preparation for hosting:

- A mandatory onsite Candidacy Visit within one year of becoming eligible for ACEN Accreditation [NOTE: Nursing education units seeking accreditation for a second nursing program type have the option of declining a second Candidacy Visit for the second program.];
- An Initial Accreditation site visit within two years of achieving a Candidate status;
- A Continuing Accreditation site visit five years after achieving Initial Accreditation;
- Ongoing Continuing Accreditation site visits every eight years following the first five-year reaccreditation visit.

All international nursing programs must pay all required fees before the onsite visit. If any ACEN invoice remains unpaid within the required timeframe before a visit, the visit will be cancelled.

### English Proficiency

English proficiency among program faculty and students is strongly recommended, as it supports full and effective participation in the accreditation process. Programs where faculty and students are not fluent in English are still welcome to pursue ACEN accreditation. Regardless of English proficiency, the following requirements apply to all programs:

- All documents and written materials submitted for the accreditation process must be provided in English. This includes self-study materials, supporting evidence, and any written correspondence. Programs may consider using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to translate documents required as part of the accreditation process; however, the program is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of all translated documents.
- A qualified translator must be available throughout all onsite visit activities. Onsite visits may include meetings with faculty, students, administrators, clinical partners, and other stakeholders — any of whom may require translation support. To ensure objectivity during the evaluation process, the translator must not be a member of the nursing faculty.
- Programs should carefully plan for the cost of translation services. Professional translation of accreditation materials and the presence of a qualified translator during the onsite visit may represent an additional expense.

### Security

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.

## Eligibility and Candidacy Process

Once program faculty and administration have completed their readiness assessment and determined their commitment to pursue ACEN accreditation, the international Candidacy process is as follows:

### Step 1: Establishing Eligibility

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

- Placement within a governing organization that 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.
- Provide documentation of governmental and regulatory approval to seek ACEN accreditation, if required.

To verify eligibility, the international program must complete and submit the International Candidacy Eligibility Application. The ACEN staff will review the application to determine Candidacy eligibility. The application must be accompanied by an [International Candidacy Eligibility Application fee](#). Once ACEN has received the application fee, the application will be reviewed, and an eligibility status will be determined in approximately 10 business days.

Possible results of the review include the following:

- The program is deemed eligible to pursue Candidacy.
- The program must resubmit with additional information/clarification.
- The program is deemed ineligible to pursue Candidacy.

## **Step 2: Candidacy Presentation and Onsite Candidacy Visit**

International nursing education programs determined to be eligible for Candidacy must schedule a mandatory onsite Candidacy Visit; the visit must occur within one year of eligibility determination. If a program's eligibility expires prior to scheduling the Candidacy site visit, then the program must restart the process to renew its eligibility status.

In preparation for the onsite Candidacy visit, programs will submit a Candidacy Presentation and supporting evidence a minimum of six weeks prior to the onsite visit. See the [Candidacy Presentation – Written Instructions](#) for details in the creation of the Candidacy Presentation.

The onsite visit will be conducted by two ACEN Directors who will:

1. provide extensive feedback on the Candidacy Presentation report and evidence to assist the program with preparation for a complete Self-Study Report, evidence, and an initial accreditation site visit;
2. assist faculty and administration with their understanding of the ACEN Standards, Criteria, policies, and procedures;
3. decide whether a program may proceed with the Candidacy process, based on the Director's findings during the review of program materials and onsite visit. One of the following will be determined:
  - **Approval:** Candidacy Approval is granted when a nursing program demonstrates:
    - a. it is currently compliant with the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed or has the potential to be compliant within the Candidacy timeframe, and
    - b. it has the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based upon the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed.

Candidacy approval is valid for two years. Approval of International Candidacy does not guarantee that the program will achieve initial accreditation. If a program's Candidacy expires prior to scheduling an initial accreditation site visit, then the program must restart the process to renew its Candidacy status.

After achieving ACEN accreditation, international programs must comply with Policy #14 *Reporting Substantive Change*. Candidate status is based on the information provided in the Candidacy Eligibility Application and/or Candidacy Presentation. Because changes may affect a program's eligibility to pursue or achieve initial accreditation, programs approved for Candidacy must notify ACEN of any changes that occur during the Candidacy process. See ACEN Policy #34 *Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation* and Policy #3 *Eligibility for Initial or Continuing Accreditation*.

- **Deferral:** Candidacy Deferral occurs when a nursing program:
  - a. presented inconsistent evidence of current compliance with the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed, or of the potential to achieve compliance within the Candidacy timeframe; and
  - b. presented inconsistent evidence of the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based on the selected ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed.

Deferred programs must complete the specified actions or required changes and resubmit the presentation within one year of notification. The presentation must describe how the program addressed the recommended actions or concerns. The presentation will be reviewed by Directors and either Approved (as described above) or Disapproved (as described below).

- **Disapproval:** Candidacy Disapproval occurs when a 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 during the Candidacy timeframe, and
  - b. did not demonstrate the potential to achieve ACEN accreditation based upon the ACEN Standards and Criteria reviewed.

Programs that are disapproved are withdrawn from the Candidacy process. Fees are not refunded when a program is withdrawn.

- **Program Ineligibility:** ACEN withdraws the program from the International Candidacy process. No fees will be refunded if a program is withdrawn.

The Directors will provide review findings and the Candidacy status determination to the program at the exit meeting during the onsite visit. Approximately 4–6 weeks following the onsite visit, the program will receive a copy of the visit report (including all findings and recommendations), which the program can use to make program improvements and preparations.

Programs that do not achieve Candidacy or Initial Accreditation may restart the Candidacy process at any time after disapproval, withdrawal, or expiration of Candidacy.

### **Step 3: Self-Study Report and Initial Onsite Visit**

After a program is approved for Candidacy, the program has two years to prepare the Self-Study Report and evidence and host the initial accreditation site visit. The *ACEN Accreditation Manual* provides additional guidance for hosting an onsite visit. The manual sections addressing self-review, the Self-Study Report, and site visits (including the responsibilities of the Team Chair, Team Members, and nursing program) apply to all programs, including those located outside the United States and its Territories.

## **Program Responsibilities for Onsite Visits**

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 following information is provided as a supplement for international programs planning for any onsite accreditation visit.

### **Length of Visit**

Candidacy Visits for nursing programs located outside the United States and its Territories will be a minimum of five days for a single program type; the onsite portion of the visit will be a minimum of three full days. When more than one nursing program type and/or multiple locations are under review, additional days may be required.

### **Travel/Transportation**

The program is responsible for all travel costs incurred for each peer evaluator:

- Air travel will be at business class or higher for each evaluator;
- Site visit fees and airline travel expenses will be invoiced after the air travel is booked by ACEN; these must be paid prior to the visit; and,
- Additional fees incurred during the site visit will be invoiced after the conclusion of the visit.

The program is also responsible for arranging all local and on-ground transportation during the onsite visits subject to ACEN approval.

### **Hotel Accommodations**

Following confirmation of onsite visit dates, the program is responsible for:

- securing a separate, private room for each peer evaluator at a hotel pre-approved by ACEN;
- providing room confirmations to the Team Chair; and,
- paying for hotel accommodations.

### **Food/Beverages**

The program must provide customary food/beverages during the hours that reviewers/peer evaluators are on-campus or visiting clinical settings (e.g., lunch and bottled water). Additionally, arrangements for breakfast and dinner must be considered and may include the hotel restaurant(s), which should be included in room arrangements.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

In advance of an onsite visit, the program is responsible for providing information to the Team Chair related to customs, traditions, and expectations related to, but not limited to, dress and food.

### **Visit Agenda**

ACEN will provide required agenda items to the program. The nurse administrator must provide a detailed draft agenda to the Team Chair a minimum of eight weeks in advance of an onsite visit. The Team Chair will work with the nurse administrator to finalize the agenda.

### **Questions?**

Please contact an ACEN Director at [acendirector@acenursing.org](mailto:acendirector@acenursing.org).