

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY
AND PRECOLLEGIATE ARTS SCHOOLS**

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MEMORANDUM

TO: ACCPAS Institutions and Constituents

FROM: Karen P. Moynahan, Executive Director

RE: Pressing Forward – Continuing Our Work During Uncertain Times

There is no question that these are unprecedented times. There is no question that the challenges faced and hardships endured will test our fortitude, patience, and resolve. But there is also no question that our individual and collective efforts as a community of thoughtful, wise, and dedicated arts administrators have served us faithfully for decades and have assisted us to prevail during previous crises, and that such efforts will enable us to address the widespread effects of this pandemic as well.

What awaits us when this crisis has subsided is a looming unknown. In all honesty, what awaits us tomorrow is unknown. Understandably, any level of planning and decision-making comfort to which we have become accustomed may now have been replaced by a palpable level of uncertainty. The responsibilities before us may seem daunting, and rightfully so. However, the abiding principles which guide our work and in which we believe, stand behind, and articulate remain as sure and certain as they ever did.

Certain are we of our shared vision for our artform, which at its core places above all else the health, well-being, and intellectual development and advancement of all involved. Certain are we of the trust we place in ourselves and our colleagues to face, consider, and address challenges that arise. Certain are we of the value of our work and through this work, the means developed to educate thousands of students, bind in collective focus our faculties, and bring together our communities in fulfillment of artistic, scholarly, and educational visions.

It remains imperative that we not only recall and recommit to our institutional and shared visions, but continue rallying our wills, our efforts, and the resources necessary and available to sustain our work, and our efforts to address the complex and challenging issues we face.

National Problem

ACCPAS continues to monitor national and international conditions, and the effects local, state, and national pronouncements and policies intended to stem the spread of COVID-19 are having or could have on the work of its accredited institutions and constituencies. ACCPAS's intention and comprehensive efforts to work with representatives from institutions directly and on a one-on-one basis continue – this to ensure that each institution has in hand information which pertains to its current and particular situation – information which can assist administrators as they consider local options, opportunities, and possibilities. In support of and in addition to these efforts, ACCPAS provides the information offered below.

Ongoing Compliance with ACCPAS Standards

Latitude and Flexibility. Applications, approaches, and methodologies established by institutions and accepted as common practice based on years of their proven efficiency and effectiveness may no longer be practical, or in some cases, possible. Many institutions have adopted or may adopt temporary practices, procedures, and policies in response to the current situation. Disruptions, such as mandates which require social distancing or individuals to shelter in place, require institutions to find new ways to address functions once served by long-standing virtually ubiquitous practices. Practices that pertain to issues such as the delivery of course content, rehearsal and performance participation, studio participation, grading policies, admission procedures, and the like, are being reconsidered, recalibrated, and reintroduced in creatively modified ways. Although ACCPAS standards are set in a framework which offers flexibility and provides latitude, a framework which encourages experimentation, innovation, and the development of new approaches to curricula which enables institutions to address the functions expressed in the standards and their fulfillment in various ways, many institutions are left to wonder whether their planned initiatives (i.e., new curricular programs, substantive changes) and/or newly and swiftly implemented policies will enable them to continue to adhere to applicable ACCPAS standards. Should such reasonable questions arise, administrators are asked to contact the National Office staff swiftly and without hesitation. Please remember that the National Office staff exists to serve ACCPAS institutions and constituencies. Though the ACCPAS Commission holds singular authority and responsibility to ascertain compliance, the National Office staff can provide information, assistance, and advice. Please feel free to take advantage of the assistance staff can provide to you as you unpack and consider issues of concern and work through scenarios that not only enable the institution to address current realities but attend to ACCPAS requirements. It remains important for ACCPAS institutions to meet the letter and spirit of the standards as appropriate – standards expressed in functions which indicate to students, the public, and state/federal agencies the basic content and level of rigor expected in community and precollegiate education and training, and the skills, knowledge, and competencies that students enrolled in these programs of study are expected to acquire and master.

Looking for Solutions. Ideas and feedback provided by peers can be invaluable. However, a practice that may work well for some, if accepted as a panacea for all, may be less effective in addressing individual challenges faced by other institutions. It is important to remember that each institution and situation is unique, and therefore that each situation requires careful thought, consideration, and decision-making which specifically addresses the issues before the institution. One of the strengths of our education system is the freedom available to each institution to create, design, and implement initiatives and curricular programs which align with locally stated missions and intents, and the ability these freedoms provide to institutions to solve problems on their own terms given local conditions and the availability of resources. Administrators should seek information pertinent to current situations from appropriate and confirmed authorities, but use this information specifically and perhaps, uniquely. Information and analysis that specifically targets an institution's particular challenges can inform decision-making processes in invaluable ways. Implementation of a one-size-fits-all, "off-the-shelf" solution may exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, existing undesirable conditions. This approach may require time to collect information and consider various options. However, such an approach may provide to the institution the most comprehensive set of means to assist it to find the most effective way forward.

The Long-Term View. Noting the changes being made by institutions in direct response to unfolding circumstances, some wonder whether ACCPAS will take immediate negative action which could jeopardize an institution's current accreditation status. It is important to remember

that ACCPAS reviews each institution against the standards as they apply to the institution given its current and planned programs and initiatives. ACCPAS will continue to ascertain what has been promised to students, whether these promises are being fulfilled, and whether in fulfilling its promises, the institution continues to meet applicable standards expressed primarily in functions rather than methods. It is also important to remember that all ACCPAS Commission reviews operate within an existing, established, and published system of due process – a system which opens conversations; welcomes dialogue; offers the opportunity to discuss comprehensively an institution’s initiatives, and based on these initiatives, its ongoing ability to comply with standards; and reaches conclusion only after consideration of all salient information.

Comprehensive Reviews and On-Site Visits

Every accredited institution is required to schedule its next comprehensive accreditation review and conduct its associated on-site evaluative visit in timely fashions and in accord with ACCPAS [Procedures](#). The next scheduled year of institutional review may be found in the ACCPAS [Directory Lists](#). In addition to the information found on the ACCPAS website, the following is provided in reply to inquiries received during the last several weeks.

- Self-Study materials in support of comprehensive reviews must be sent to visiting evaluators and the National Office no later than four weeks before the visit. Institutions are reminded that the Self-Study itself must be submitted in hard copy, but that the Management Documents Portfolio may be submitted on a USB flash drive.
- Institutions finding it necessary to postpone comprehensive accreditation reviews from one academic year to the next for good cause may wish to review ACCPAS’s [Policy on Postponements](#). As a reminder, requests for postponements require staff (one-year postponements) or Commission (beyond one year) action.
- Institutions that were scheduled for Spring 2020 on-site evaluative visits whose timelines were extended to Fall 2020 need not resubmit or amend existing Self-Study and Management Documents Portfolios materials. However, they may utilize the [Optional Response](#) procedure to provide new information and/or notice of changes if desired.
- Evaluators (and consultants) who have incurred expenses as a result of on-site reviews are asked to submit their expense forms with receipts for reimbursement at the earliest possible time, noting the address to where the reimbursement should be directed. Individuals seeking information regarding expenses or reimbursements may contact Tracy Maraney (tmaraney@arts-accredit.org). Please note that information regarding expenses, including expense forms and associated receipts may be submitted electronically for expedited service.

Applications for Plan Approval and Substantive Change

If an accredited institution plans to add a new curricular program which falls under ACCPAS’s purview, or make substantive changes to current curricular programs, policies, and/or operations, applications for Plan Approval or Substantive Change as appropriate and applicable may be required.

Institutions are asked to note the following:

- Guidelines and requirements applicable to Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing may be found in the ACCPAS *Handbook 2020*, Rules of Practice and Procedure, Article VIII.; Substantive Change may be found in the ACCPAS *Handbook 2020*, Rules of Practice and Procedure, Article VII.

- Should questions arise regarding the potential necessity to submit applications for Plan Approval and/or Substantive Change, please contact Adèle-Marie Buis (abuis@arts-accredit.org) prior to submission. Staff will work with each institution individually to ascertain and confirm the necessity for submission.

Further Information

There exists at this time an abundance of information pertaining to the coronavirus and its effects, as well as planned initiatives anticipated to be taken by the federal government and states. Provided herein are several particularly relevant sites: the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), and the [United States Department of Education \(ED\)](#). We ask that you remain abreast of federal and state requirements that may affect the work of your institution.

Questions/Advice/Support

As of March 17, the National Office staff has been working remotely following normal Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. (EDT) office hours. Staff continues to work directly with administrators seeking assistance with regard to accreditation matters and standards compliance. As you bring this semester to a close and continue to plan for the summer and fall, the National Office staff remains available to serve you and encourages you to call or email if any questions arise or assistance is needed. A list of staff names and assigned responsibilities may be found on the ACCPAS website [staff page](#). As well, please do not hesitate to contact me directly if I may offer assistance (kmoytahan@arts-accredit.org; (703) 437-0700, ext. 116).

During these times, the company and assistance which can be offered by colleagues and friends in the ACCPAS community is inestimable. We hope that each of you will not hesitate to extend a hand when available or request one when needed.

Conclusion

There are many lessons that can be learned during hardships. In the past several weeks, we have been reminded countless times of the adaptability, flexibility, and thoughtfulness of our institutional representatives and colleagues. Every encounter appears to be framed by a desire on the part of each individual to work through or around problems, finding ways to ensure that our individual and collective work continues. Thank you for the depth of your commitment and for the work you have done and will do during this difficult time. Thank you for the work you do to protect and advance that which matters to your students, their parents, your community, and to these artforms we have the good fortune and honor to serve. Please remain safe, and well, and positive.

Thank you.

Warm regards.

KPM:lo