



*Commission on Colleges  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

## **JOINT CURRICULAR VENTURES INVOLVING THE AWARD OF CREDIT BY MEMBER INSTITUTIONS: POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

### **- Policy Statement-**

This policy applies to affiliations, partnerships, technical assistance agreements, articulation agreements, cooperative agreements, consortial agreements, contracts, and memoranda of understanding established for credit-bearing and degree-granting joint curricular ventures with regionally-accredited, non-regionally-accredited, and international institutions or organizations. While the Commission on Colleges recognizes the right of a member institution to develop appropriate joint curricular ventures for courses, degree programs, dual degree programs, and joint degree programs, the Commission reserves the right to prohibit the use of its accreditation to authenticate credit courses or programs offered with organizations not so accredited. The not-for-profit institution is cautioned to review its tax exempt status, as governed by the state or federal regulations, so that it will not be affected by such contractual arrangements with a for-profit organization.

Except in the case of an approved joint degree wherein the accredited institution provides direct instruction for at least 25 percent of the course work leading to an undergraduate degree, or at least 50 percent of the course work leading to a graduate degree, neither the name of the institution accredited by the Commission nor the signatures of officials from that institution should appear on the diplomas, certificates and other such documents of the partnering institution(s).

### **Principles Relevant to All Joint Curricular Ventures**

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of its institutions. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Section 1) Furthermore, institutions are expected to ensure the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortia relationships or contractual agreements, ensure ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluate consortial relationships/agreements against the purpose of the institution. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.7) When developing joint curricular ventures, institutions must ensure that:

1. the primary purpose of offering such a course or program is educational. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Core Requirement 2.4)
2. any course or program offered is consistent with the educational purpose and goals of the institution. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Federal Requirement 4.2) If an institution alters its purpose and goals, it must have the approval of its board. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1) Institutions must notify the Commission on Colleges when planning significant changes in purpose and goals. (*Principles*, Comprehensive Standard 3.12.1) See the Commission's "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions."
3. the institution employed sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for any course or program. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.6)

4. any course or program has been approved by the faculty and administration. (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.1)
5. any course or program meets the following standards of the *Principles of Accreditation*:
  - Recruitment and counseling of students (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.9.3 and Federal Requirement 4.6)
  - Admission of students to courses and/or to the sponsoring institution where credit programs are pursued (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.3)
  - Evaluation of student progress (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1)
  - Record keeping (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.9.2)
  - Faculty qualifications (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1)
  - Facilities (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.11 and Core Requirement 2.11.2)
  - Instructional resources (*Principles of Accreditation*, Core Requirement 2.9)
  - Transcribing credit (*Principles of Accreditation*, Comprehensive Standard 3.4.4)

### **International Joint Curricular Ventures**

Although international relationships are not specifically referred to in the *Principles of Accreditation*, numerous requirements of the *Principles* apply to the transfer or acceptance of credit from foreign institutions. Of particular importance are those pertaining to course content, level of instruction, faculty qualifications, the library and other support services, and the environment in which instruction takes place. International relationships should be consistent with the principles identified at the beginning of this policy statement and with the three sets of guidelines presented below.

When a member institution develops an agreement resulting in acceptance of a significant amount of credit, the agreement must clearly specify those requirements of the *Principles* that must be satisfied, and the institution should consult the Commission's document "Substantive Change for Accredited Institutions" to determine whether notification and approval apply. In addition, contracts for international joint curricular ventures must clearly provide for timely access to the international partner institution and its documents when such access is requested by the Commission for purposes of reviewing accreditation-related issues.

Some international institutions may be licensed, approved, or otherwise recognized by an appropriate governmental agency of their country. Although these agencies may be helpful in ensuring the quality of the educational experience, they do not relieve the member institution from maintaining its responsibility to ensure quality in accord with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

For affiliate or technical assistance relationships, member institutions should be responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring all public communications by the international institutions regarding both the accredited status of the programs at the international institution and the influence of the member institution in assisting in the transfer of international students to American colleges and universities. Those communications should make clear to the public that accreditation by the Commission does not extend to the programs taken at the international institution.

The following disclaimer must be used by an institution accredited by the Commission to help the public understand the nature of affiliate or technical assistance relationships:

[Name of member institution] is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award [state degree levels here] degrees. [Name of international institution] is not accredited by the Commission on Colleges and the accreditation of [name of member institution] does not extend to or include [name of international institution] or its students. Although [name of member institution] accepts certain [name of international institution] course work in transfer, other colleges and universities may not accept this work in transfer, even if it appears on a transcript from [name of member institution].

## - Guidelines -

### **Guidelines for Joint Curricular Ventures with Regionally-Accredited Institutions**

When developing joint curricular ventures with regionally-accredited institutions, member institutions must be able to demonstrate compliance with the principles identified for all joint curricular ventures and should also ensure that the contract:

1. is executed only by duly designated officers of the institution and their counterparts in the contracting organization. While other faculty and administrative representatives will undoubtedly be involved in the contract negotiations, care should be taken to avoid implied or apparent power to execute the contract by unauthorized personnel.
2. establishes a definite understanding between the institution and contractor regarding the work to be performed, the period of the agreement, and the conditions under which any possible renewal or renegotiation of the contract would take place.
3. establishes guiding principles for the curricular joint venture and defines
  - both administrative and academic leadership responsibilities
  - evidence of success
4. includes a teach-out agreement that protects enrolled students in the event that it is terminated or renegotiated.
5. provides procedures for handling grievances regarding any aspect of the course or program and for addressing perceived breaches of the contract.
6. clearly defines
  - the institution awarding the credit
  - the courses, programs, and services included in the contract
  - how outcomes assessment will be provided
  - how appropriately qualified faculties of the contracting entities will periodically review the courses and the programs
  - how appropriate student support services will be assured
  - how access to learning resources will be assured.
7. specifies financial compensation for services provided by each contracting entity and sets forth a mechanism to account for those services.
8. meets all requirements for federal and state student aid programs that might be used by students of the contracting entities.
9. submitted to federal and state agencies, when required by regulations, and to the Commission on Colleges for approval of substantive changes.

### **Guidelines for Joint Curricular Ventures with Non-Regionally-Accredited Institutions**

When developing joint curricular ventures with non-regionally-accredited institutions, member institutions must be able to demonstrate compliance with the principles identified for all joint curricular ventures and should add to the nine guidelines set forth above, the guidelines set forth below.

The Contract. Member institutions should ensure that the contract:

1. clearly vests the ultimate responsibility for the performance of the necessary control functions for the educational offering with the accredited institution granting credits for the offering. Such

- performance responsibility by the credit-granting institution would minimally consist of adequate provisions for review and approval of work performed in each functional area by the contractor.
2. clearly establishes the responsibilities of the institution and contractor regarding indirect cost, security, approval of salaries, termination costs, licenses and fees, equipment, tuition refund, subcontract and travel, student records, property ownership and accountability, faculty facilities, inventions and patents, safety regulations, publications and copyrights, insurance coverage, accounting records, audits, and accreditation visits from regional, state, or international entities.
  3. assigns to the member institution the oversight of:
    - Advertising and recruitment
    - Admissions
    - Appointment of faculty
    - Content and rigor of courses/programs
    - Evaluation of student work
    - Outcomes assessment
    - Academic advising
    - Support services, including housing

The Enrollment Agreement. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. the enrollment agreement clearly outlines the obligations of the institution, the contracting organization, and the student, and a copy of the enrollment agreement is furnished to the student before any payment is made.
2. before the student signs the enrollment agreement, the institution should have determined that the applicant is fully informed as to the nature of the obligation being entered into and responsibilities and rights under the enrollment agreement.
3. the enrollment agreement is not binding until it has been accepted by the authorities of the institution vested with this responsibility.

Tuition Policies: Rates. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. the institution shows that the total tuition charge for each of its courses is reasonable in the light of the service to be rendered, the equipment to be furnished, and its operating costs. Group training contracts showing lower individual rates may be negotiated with business, industrial, or governmental agencies.
2. tuition charges for courses are bona fide, effective on specific dates, and applicable to all who enroll thereafter or are presently in school, provided the enrollment agreement so stipulates.
3. all extra charges and costs incidental to training are revealed to the prospective student before enrollment.

Tuition Policies: Refunds and Cancellations. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. the institution has a fair and equitable tuition refund and cancellation policy.
2. the refund policy and procedure are in keeping with generally accepted refund practices in the higher education community, applicable to all students, and clearly stated in appropriate official publications.

Tuition Policies: Collection Practices. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. methods used by an institution in requesting or demanding payment follow sound ethical business practices.
2. if promissory notes or contracts for tuition are sold or discounted to third parties by the institution, enrollers or their financial sponsors are made aware of this action.

Student Recruitment: Advertising and Promotional Literature. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. all advertising and promotional literature used indicates that education, and not employment, is being offered.
2. all advertising and promotional literature used includes the correct name of the school.

Student Recruitment: Institutional Representatives/Agents. Member institutions should ensure that:

1. representatives/agents are adequately trained and properly supervised.
2. it adheres to the laws and regulations of each of the states in which it operates or solicits students that representatives/agents working in any such state is properly licensed or registered as required by the laws of the state.
3. representatives/agents comply with the *Principles of Accreditation* and the Commission's policies and procedures.
4. approves advertising and promotional materials used by representatives/agents prior to their use.
5. representatives/agents provide the applicant a receipt for money collected and a copy of the enrollment agreement.
6. no representative uses any title, such as "counselor," "advisor," or "registrar," that tends to imply duties and responsibilities beyond those that are actually assigned.
7. no representative violates in writing or orally any of the standards applicable to advertising and promotional material.

### **Guidelines for Joint Curricular Ventures with International Entities**

When developing joint curricular ventures with international entities, member institutions must be able to demonstrate compliance with the principles identified for all joint curricular ventures and should meet the expectations set forth in all of the guidelines previously presented. In addition, the institution should ensure that:

1. it can document the accepted legal basis for its operations in the host country.
2. the international education program reflects the educational emphasis of the U.S. institution, including a commitment to general education, when appropriate.
3. the program's qualified faculty members are proficient in the language of instruction or simultaneous interpretation is provided.
4. the standard of student achievement in the international program is equivalent to the standard of student achievement on the U.S. campus.
5. it can demonstrate its financial capacity to underwrite the international program without diminishing its financial support of the U. S. campus. Financing of the international program is incorporated into the regular budgeting and auditing process.
6. it can provide a full accounting of the financing of its international program, including an accounting of funds designated for third parties within any contractual relationship.
7. the official contract is both in English and in the primary language of the contracting institution, that the U.S. institution controls the international program, that the foreign party to the contract is legally qualified to enter into the contract, and that the legal jurisdiction under which its provisions will be interpreted will be that of the U.S. institution.
8. its primary catalog describes its international program.
9. it does not sell or franchise the rights to its name or its accreditation.
10. all references to transfer of academic credit reflect the reality of U.S. practice.
11. if U.S. accreditation is mentioned in materials related to the international program, the role and purpose of U.S. accreditation is fairly and accurately explained within these materials.
12. it exercises control over recruitment and admission of students in the international program, and international students admitted abroad meet admissions requirements similar to those used for international students admitted to the U.S. campus, including appropriate language proficiencies.

13. reasonable steps are taken to ensure a healthy, safe, and secure campus environment.
14. all international students are admitted to and enrolled in their institution before a member institution transcripts, awards, or otherwise recognizes transfer of credit for international students, and all college-level academic credits earned in the international program are applicable to degree programs at the U.S. institution.
15. it maintains official records of academic credit earned in its international program.
16. the official transcript of record issued by the U.S. institution follows the institution's practice in identifying by site or through course numbering the credits earned in its off-campus programs. In the recording of credit for international joint curricular ventures, the academic transcript indicates specific courses taken and the name of the providing institution or organization.
17. credits transferred in, awarded, or otherwise recognized are comparable to its own. When the member institution awards block credit for significant amounts of credit from international institutions, but does not employ faculty qualified in the disciplines where the credit is awarded, the accepting institution should ensure that those credits/experiences have been evaluated by persons with appropriate academic preparation in these areas.

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