



## **MAINTENANCE OF COMMISSION RECORDS**

The Commission shall maintain complete and accurate records of:

- a. Its last full accreditation or preaccreditation review of each institution or program, including on-site Visiting Team reports, the institution's or program's responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted by the agency between regular reviews, and a copy of the institution's or program's most recent self-study; and
- b. All decisions made throughout an institution's or program's affiliation with the agency regarding the accreditation and preaccreditation of any institution or program and substantive changes, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions

### **Section 1: Records Defined.**

- a. Records are identified as any paper, book, photograph, microfilm, optical disk, map, drawing, chart, card or magnetic tape or disk or digital copy; and includes reports, institutional self-studies, correspondence, minutes of formal meetings, memoranda, institutional publications, evaluators' records, and other materials which are generated or received by the Commission and its staff in connection with the Commission's accrediting function. Records retention periods apply only to the designated "official" copy of the record, i.e., the one copy of the record established as the official file copy; not duplicate copies which are made for informational or convenience purposes.
- b. Duplicate copies, or materials such as card and notebook indices, brochures, newspaper, magazine, or journal articles, and other publications; and miscellaneous correspondence and memoranda such as confirming dates for staff visits, invitations to attend conferences, etc., and other incidental or personal business of Commissioners and/or staff are retained only for so long as they serve any useful purpose. The Commission staff is responsible for taking the time to review and purge these types of records at least once every two years.
- c. Inactive hardcopy records, i.e., those whose reference frequency is so low that their removal from the office area would not hamper operations at all, are transferred to storage locations until scheduled for destruction.
- d. All data stored on magnetic media or disk (computer records) are retained on a current basis, or until superseded. Computer records on network servers are archived via the Internet to an off-site server each night. Retention, storage, and disposition of Commission computer records stored on magnetic media or disk are the responsibility of Commission personnel, in accordance with the retention periods specified in the records retention schedule.
- e. Member institutions are given the option of having their original self-study reports and periodic review reports returned rather than having them destroyed by the Commission in accordance with the records retention schedule. Reports submitted electronically are destroyed in accordance with the Commission's retention schedule.
- f. Records may be subject to subpoena by private litigants and governmental agencies. Generally, the destruction of records pursuant to a normal policy of records retention creates no legal or ethical problems. However, in the following situations, the destruction of records must be suspended in the area of question at least until the matter is resolved:
  - 1) After a formal request requiring the production of documents;
  - 2) During the course of alleged voluntary cooperation with governmental authorities; or
  - 3) After learning of a relevant inquiry but before being contacted by the authorities.
- g. Subject to lawful court order, or by decision of the Commission or its Executive Committee, the records of the Commission relating to the evaluation or accreditation of any present, prospective, or former institutional member shall be confidential and shall not be disclosed outside the Commission without the prior written consent of the governing authority of the institution concerned, except in a

case where the institution's own release of information distorts or otherwise creates a misleading impression of its accredited status or its relation to the Commission. The Commission's policy entitled "Collegiality and Public Communication in the Accrediting Process" is intended to protect the confidentiality and promote the effectiveness of evaluation and accreditation processes.

## **Section 2: Records for Accredited and Candidate Institutions.**

The Commissions will maintain the following records for each accredited and candidate institution:

- a. Records of the all accreditation or candidate actions by the Commission(s) since the institution was first granted Candidacy for Accreditation;
- b. The most recent report of a visiting team to the institution until superseded by the report of another visiting team for the purposes of reaccreditation;
- c. The most recent self-study document until completion of the Mid-Term review process or similar process of a cooperating accrediting agency;
- d. Reports of all mid-term reviews since the last visiting team's visit and report;
- e. Reports of all special visits to the institution since the last visiting team's visit;
- f. The last and current Annual Profiles;
- g. Official Notification of Accreditation letters for all accreditation actions taken by the Commission(s) since the institution was first granted Candidacy for Accreditation;
- h. Records of the degree to which the institution participates actively in the Commission(s)' activities, including submitting team member nominations, providing team members, participating in training for team chairs, hosting workshops, etc.

Published List of Accredited and Candidate Institutions. The Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools shall maintain a list of accredited and candidate institutions that is accessible to the public on its website.

## **Section 3: Records for Postsecondary Institutions.**

The Commission on Secondary Schools shall maintain and store complete and accurate records relating to each member postsecondary institution as follows:

- a. Records of the last two accreditation or candidate reviews of the institution;
- b. The last two reports of the visiting team to the institution;
- c. The last two self-study documents;
- d. Reports of all periodic reviews since the last visiting team's visit and report;
- e. Reports of all on-site and special visits to the institution;
- f. Annual Profiles;
- g. The last and current Annual Reports;
- h. Records of complaints about the institution;
- i. All correspondence regarding the institution with the U.S. Secretary of Education, state agencies, and other accrediting agencies;
- j. Official Notification of Accreditation letters for all accreditation actions taken by the Commission since the institution was first granted Candidacy for Accreditation; and
- k. Records of the degree to which the institution participates actively in the Commission's activities, including submitting team member nominations, providing team members, participating in training for team chairs, hosting workshops, etc.

Separation of Elementary, Secondary, and Postsecondary Institution Records. All records for institutions offering postsecondary programs shall be maintained separately from the other institutional records of the Commissions.