

**AERAC Higher Education Accreditation**

**Purposes and Types of Accreditation**

Universities go through various levels of scrutiny. This may include accreditation of the entire university or accreditation of programs within a specific discipline. The whole university may be accredited by one of the six regional accrediting agencies. Successful accreditation by one of these agencies is required in order to qualify for the federal loan programs. There are also specialized disciplinary accrediting bodies such as AERAC that look at specific programs of study.

**Specialized Disciplinary Accreditation**

AERAC reviews are both administrative and curricular in their evaluation components. The administrative portionof the evaluation gathers information relating to such areas as the qualifications of faculty, the ratio of students to faculty, the content that is delivered, and the supervision provided to students. This portion requires the program to provide information about how well it complies with the administrative standards, the faculty standards, the clinical standards and program evaluation standards. This information must be provided through documents that serve as evidence of compliance. The review is an evaluation of the program’s compliance with the standards that represent best practice within the discipline.

The curricular portion of the evaluation has the added function of working toward academic excellence. This evaluation requires the faculty within the program to examine the program’s own effectiveness in educating its students. The curricular evaluation determines to what extent the instruction results in the learning outcomes desired for students. When weaknesses are identified, faculty examine them and determine the changes that are needed to improve student learning.

The curricular portion requires the department to show evidence that faculty have engaged in a program of assessment of student learning outcomes and program evaluation designed to pursue continuous improvement. This requires the faculty to evaluate student learning through such measures as performance on critical student learning outcomes, clinical placement evaluations, employer surveys, and certification performance. In addition, student learning outcomes are mapped to desired program outcomes to determine if goals are being met. It is not enough to simply list the stated measurements, but the faculty must also show evidence that the department has met periodically to examine the outcomes and has made changes to courses, instructional methods or program structure to ensure that students learn the outcomes that are required.

​​For both the administrative and curricular evaluations each standard is evaluated through evidence submitted to AERAC.  Each standard is marked as met or not met on an evaluation form. ​A site visit, including i​nterviews with faculty, ​ students​, and university staff​ helps to verify compliance and to answer questions that have arisen as the evidence has been reviewed.

**The Standards**

The **Core Standards** are composed of Administrative Requirements, Faculty Requirements, Clinical Requirements, and Assessment and Program Evaluation Requirements. The core standards must be fully achieved for a program to receive full accreditation. These standards reflect upon the structure, internal and external university recognition, administrative commitment, accessibility, and nondiscrimination policies of the program. The standards are listed as Administrative Requirements, Faculty Requirements, and Clinical Requirements Assessment and Program Evaluation Standards.

​​The **Curricular Standards** ​are in separate documents for each of the disciplines. The curricular standards must be fully achieved for a program to receive full accreditation.​​

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| Core Standards | | | | |
| **I. Administrative Requirements** | | | | |
| All Administrative Standards must be fully met to receive AER accreditation. | | | | |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| 1. The university must be accredited by a regional higher education accrediting body. Non-US universities can request that their local accreditation system be accepted. | Page from official university publication  Link to specific university website stating accreditation status |  |  |  |
| b. Educational offerings must be internally recognized as part of a degree program or university recognized certificate program through specific program identification in the catalogue and on the transcript. | Page from official university publication  Link to specific university website identifying degree or certification status |  |  |  |
| c. The program must offer an established sequence of coursework that includes the curricular content that encompasses the competencies established for each discipline (TVI, O&M, VRT, LVT, and ATIS). All courses and practicum/student teaching experiences are approved by the University as required course work. | Syllabi  Curriculum alignment chart |  |  |  |
| d. Programs must have been in existence for a year with documentation of student progress. | Dated memo from provost stating program is approved  Proof of course scheduling |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| e. Training must occur at the baccalaureate or higher level. | Official university document stating degree offered  Memo from provost stating degree level for which program is approved |  |  |  |
| f. University commitment to the program must be evidenced. | Signed letter from the Dean stating support for the program. |  |  |  |
| g. Accessibility:  i. All curricular materials will meet the requirements of federal law and university policy for accessibility. Programs located in countries without federal mandates for accessibility must make reasonable accommodations for accessibility.  ii. The physical location of all face-to-face course meetings will meet the requirements of federal law and university policy for accessibility. Programs located in countries without federal mandates for accessibility must make reasonable accommodations for accessibility. | Regarding i.:  University policy on accessibility;  Sample accessible PDFs and Word docs;  List of teaching software used by courses;  Student assignments/portfolio samples showing requirement for submission in accessible formats;  Regarding ii.:  Letter from university ADA compliance officer and/or  Brief narrative addressing physical accessibility |  |  |  |
| h. University resources should include services to students with disabilities. | Page from official university document  Link to exact official webpage describing services to students with disabilities |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| i. University and program may not discriminate against applicants or accepted students/candidates based on minority status. Minority status includes disability, race, ethnic/linguistic/cultural background, national origin, socio-economic status, age, gender, and sexual orientation. | Official university non-discrimination policy |  |  |  |
| j. The physical plant of the university or the online platform used for distance or support education must be adequate to meet the needs of the program. | Listing of features used in courses |  |  |  |
| k. Equipment, assistive technology, and materials are available to guarantee necessary access and hands-on experiences to support candidates learning to use and teach devices, technology, and other materials. | Inventory list  Brief narrative explaining how students access materials not available on campus |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| l. Library facilities must have adequate holdings to facilitate learning and research including access to significant texts and periodicals in blindness, low vision, education, rehabilitation, and gerontology, as appropriate to the program under review. The University provides extensive, accessible on-line research capabilities with adequate research and technical support for traditional and distance students. | List of applicable journals held, by journal  Official university document or link to official website detailing university resources |  |  |  |
| m. For both face-to-face courses and distance/online courses, faculty will only use teaching methods that are accessible to and usable (i.e., teaching methods can easily be used by adult learners with reasonable skills) by students. | List or brief narrative of teaching resources used;  Demo of Learning Management System (LMS) platform during virtual tour. |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Totals** | **/13** | **/13** |

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| **II. Faculty Requirements** | | | | |
| All Faculty Standards must be fully met to receive AER accreditation. | | | | |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| a. The program must have at least one full time faculty member with the responsibility of administering the program including supervision of or direct provision of the following job responsibilities by qualified program personnel:  i. course delivery  ii. recruitment  iii. budgetary planning  iv. student advisement  v. supervision of practicum/internship  vi. curriculum development  vii. program evaluation  viii. assessment of candidate learning | Job description  Faculty assignment of responsibility  **Required document:**  Name/FTE/CV of Person who administers the program and list of courses directly provided. |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| b. **At least one appointed faculty member** must meet the following requirements:  i. Programs must have a minimum of 1 full time faculty member who dedicates at least .75 FTE to preparation of professionals in visual impairments. This standard can be met by the same person as in (a) above or by a different person. The full-time faculty member will have either:  1. a doctorate with specialization in visual impairments or deafblindness and three years clinical or practical experiences, OR  2. a master’s in visual impairments or  deafblindness, and a doctorate in a related  field and three years full time clinical or  practical experience with persons with  visual impairments.  ii. Each additional program beyond the first must have an appointed faculty member with at least a .50 FTE in that program who must:  1. Have completed a university-based degree, or certificate program in their specified profession AND  2. Must be ACVREP certified or state certified in TVI as appropriate for the program under review.  iii. Programs can decide whether to have one faculty member meet requirements 1 and 2 above, or to have two faculty members with one fulfilling the full-time requirement and another fulfilling the certification requirement. | **Required:** Name/CV/Course List of Person who provides 0.75 FTE to prepare professionals.  CV for all program personnel  List of who is responsible for teaching each course, supervising each practicum, etc.  Description of training provided to adjunct faculty.  \*\*\* Given the varied experience and training of qualified faculty members, programs should submit adequate information to show that the experience and education background of faculty members meet the spirit of this standard. |  |  |  |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| c. **Adjunct Faculty** and **additional appointed**  **faculty** will meet the following criteria for  teaching any course (on campus, distance, or online):  i. Faculty teaching skill-based/profession  specific courses (e.g., foundation of  O&M/VRT, methods of teaching children with VI) must have at least master’s level  preparation in their professional area,  ACVREP or state certification, and at least 3 years full time field-based teaching  experience or the equivalent.  ii. Faculty teaching related-content courses  (e.g., research, eye physiology) must have at least master’s level preparation and 3 years field-based teaching experience or  equivalent.  iii. Faculty teaching LVT courses relating to optics and use of optical devices may be qualified by virtue of being certified by ACVREP or may be qualified by virtue of serving as optometrists or ophthalmologists who have experience working with individuals who have low vision.  iv. Supervision, mentoring, and regular  communication will be provided for adjuncts.  v. Adjunct faculty teaching courses that include simulation activities must receive training by the program relative to the aspects of performing simulation training/teaching, including training sequence and methods of providing student feedback. |  |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| d. Other program staff must meet the following standards:  i. University clinical supervisors must have at least 2 years of direct service  experience in specialization, a  Bachelor’s degree in any related area and must hold proper ACVREP or state certification.  ii. Cooperating teacher/onsite supervisor must have at least 2 years of direct service experience in the specialization, have completed a university-based program in the area they are supervising, and must hold proper ACVREP or state certification. |  |  |  |  |
| e. Faculty-student ratios should meet the following:  i. Didactic courses: Limited by university  standards  ii. Clinical courses (i.e., courses such as  practicum, fieldwork, and internship in which the candidate is providing observation, instruction and/or assessment to learners through a placement at a school, agency, or  clinic under the supervision of a faculty or clinical faculty member): **1** supervisor to no greater than **8** students providing supervision as outlined in III.h. below.  iii. Simulation courses (i.e., courses that include occlusion or low vision simulators as a major component of the course)  1. For O&M: **1** faculty to no greater than six (**6**) students per course  2. For LVT, VRT and TVI: **1** faculty to no greater than **15** students per course (assuming each student under occlusion is paired with a fellow non-occluded student or faculty member). | Course roster showing total number of students enrolled in courses  \*\*\* Given the variety of ways to provide coursework, universities should submit adequate information to show that the faculty-student ratios meet the spirit of this standard. |  |  |  |
| f. Plan for or proof of professional development is shown through proof of current certification. If program is in a state in which full time faculty cannot maintain TVI certification, alternative proof of professional development will be accepted. | Copy of faculty/staff certifications |  |  |  |
| g. There must be a plan for periodic review of faculty, which includes student evaluations. | Brief narrative of plan for faculty review  Summary of student evaluations |  |  |  |
| h. Faculty teaching loads are established within the university. Whatever teaching load policy is established will be upheld by the AERAC. | Copy of university policy on faculty teaching load  Matrix of established teaching load and faculty teaching load |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Totals** | **/8** | **/8** |

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| **III. Clinical Requirements** | | | | |
| All Clinical Standards must be fully met to receive AER accreditation. | | | | |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| a. Students must attain a minimum of 350 hours of clinical experience.  i. Clinical placements may be scheduled over more than one term to meet number of hours and variety of experiences needed;  ii. Clinical experience is defined as student teaching, internship, practica or a combination of these. | Candidate log of hours and activities  Course syllabus |  |  |  |
| b. In addition to direct teaching, clinical placements should include observations, assessment, supervision meetings, administrative tasks, consultation, and other activities appropriate to the placement. | Candidate log of hours and activities |  |  |  |
| c. Teaching, lesson planning, and assessment must make up at least 250 of the 350 hours of clinical experience. IEP meetings with parents may also count as part of the 250 hours. | Candidate log of hours and activities  Candidate lesson plans |  |  |  |
| d. The clinical experience must provide a reasonable amount of diversity in settings, skills, and types of consumers. | Candidate portfolios  Candidate logs |  |  |  |
| e. The university has the responsibility of locating and arranging for clinical placements. | Letters of agreement for placement |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Totals** | **/5** | **/5** |

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| **IV. Assessment and Program Evaluation Standards** | | | | |
| All Assessment/Program Evaluation Standards are absolute and must be fully met to receive AER accreditation. | | | | |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| a. Each course syllabus lists the major student learning outcomes required for successful completion of the course. | Course Syllabi |  |  |  |
| b. Programs indicate specific measures beyond the final grade for a course that will be used to determine if learning outcomes have been met.  i. within 5 years of initial matriculation, at least 80% of students who have taken the ACVREP examination or teacher licensure examination must have passed it. | Listing of specific measures that may be used for assessment purposes: course student learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, employer surveys, clinical placement evaluations, comps, certification or licensure pass rates |  |  |  |
| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| c. Programs have a plan for conducting assessment at the program and student level. This should include at a minimum the number of students to be tested, type of data collection, and a schedule for reviewing the data. | Plan that outlines the assessment process. |  |  |  |
| d. Programs show evidence that they have met each year to review the results of the assessment measurements. | Calendar meeting dates reserved for assessment evaluation.  Summaries of assessment outcome meetings for each year. |  |  |  |
| e. Programs show evidence that they have used the assessment results to make needed changes that are designed to improve student learning. | Changes to courses or to the program that have occurred as a result of the assessment process |  |  |  |
| f. Clinical placement responsibilities should be appropriate to the candidate’s present skill level. | Field supervisor’s evaluation of candidates  Evaluation of candidate by university for appropriate placement  Statement from university on how candidates are matched with placements |  |  |  |
| g. An accessible clinical placement manual must be available to all clinical placement personnel and candidates and must delineate all procedures and requirements. | Placement manual or link to online placement manual |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| h. To provide adequate University supervision for clinical courses, university faculty/adjunct faculty must:  i. Observe the candidate on site or through video and audio recordings and provide written feedback for at least four lessons. If major issues are noted, sufficient additional  observation either on-site or electronic must be provided.  ii. Have weekly contact with each candidate to address any problems and successes with the placement, supervisor, and consumers/  students. Contact can consist of face-to-face meetings/classes, individual phone calls, teleconferences, accessible/usable chat rooms, or email. Contact must be of sufficient depth to ensure candidate progress. If candidates are not in a full-time clinical placement, contact must occur for every 20 hours of clinical experience rather than weekly.  iii. Have weekly contact with each cooperating teacher/onsite supervisor to discuss each candidate, any problems the candidate or  supervisor may be experiencing, and the progress of consumers/students with whom the candidate is working. Contact can consist of individual or group meetings, individual phone calls, teleconferences, or accessible/ usable chat rooms.  Contact must be of sufficient depth to ensure candidate progress. If candidates are not in a full-time clinical placement, contact must occur for every 20 hours of clinical experience rather than weekly. | University log of contacts  Syllabus of internship practicum |  |  |  |
| i. To provide adequate field supervision, the cooperating teacher/onsite supervisor must observe and provide feedback for at least 1 out of every 5 **hours** of consumer contact at the beginning of the placement, decreasing as candidate skills and judgment improve. Supervision must continue throughout the entire internship. | University log of contacts  Candidate observation forms |  |  |  |
| j. Programs submit annually to AERAC, any changes to their programs as well as completion rates, graduation rates, retention rates, available employment data, and other available data regarding program effectiveness | Annual Program Report forms. |  |  |  |
| k. Programs must provide to AERAC a summary of clinical placement assessments. | Summary with links to evaluation reports: by master teachers, ACVREP report forms |  |  |  |

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| **Standards** | **Possible Documents to Submit As Evidence** | **Documents Submitted** | **Met** | **Not Met** |
| l. Programs make available to the public the completion, graduation, retention, and employment rates of their graduates. | Public documents and media links |  |  |  |
|  |  | **Totals** | **/9** | **/9** |

List of Members of Institution’s Self-Study Committee:

Date Self-Study Completed: