

TITLE 135
LEGISLATIVE RULE
WEST VIRGINIA COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE EDUCATION
SERIES 20
INITIAL AUTHORIZATION OF DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

§135-20-1. General.

1.1. Scope. -- This rule establishes the policy regarding accreditation and approval of degree-granting institutions which offer degrees not above the associate level.

1.2. Authority. -- West Virginia Code §18B-4-7

1.3. Filing Date. -- March 29, 2019

1.4. Effective Date. -- March 29, 2019

1.5. Sunset Date. -- This rule shall terminate and have no further force or effect on March 29, 2024

§135-20-2. Purpose.

2.1. The West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education is responsible for the authorization of any institution, association or organization external to or within the State which offers credit-bearing courses or degree programs not above the associate level and which desires to offer such programs or courses of higher learning in the State of West Virginia. Authorization is required for all postsecondary providers that offer degrees at the associate level, and entities that use the term “academy,” “college,” “institution,” “university” or similar title, hereafter referred to as institution.

2.2. Prior to offering any course or degree program not above the associate level in the State, the entity shall apply to the Council for authorization to operate in the State. The provisions of this rule shall also apply to any course or programs not above the associate level delivered in the State by an out-of-state institution via distance education-based instruction if the institution will have a physical presence in the State. An out-of-state institution that solely delivers a course or program in the state via distance online instruction with no physical presence in the State, as defined in section 3, is exempt from the provisions of this rule.

2.3. This rule is designed to protect consumers and to ensure consumers are offered quality education by postsecondary education providers within the State of West Virginia.

§135-20-3. Definitions.

3.1. “Academic credit” means the certification of a student’s successful completion of a unit of a course of study leading to a formal award granted by an institution approved to offer a collegiate degree such as an associate, baccalaureate, masters or doctorate degree.

3.2. “Accreditation” means a status attained by the institution through voluntarily meeting standards set by a nongovernmental entity recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

3.3. “Authorization” means the status attained by the institution that allows the institution to offer programs and courses within the State of West Virginia. This status is granted by the WV Council for

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Community and Technical College Education when the institution demonstrates compliance with the requirements for such status.

3.4. "Commission" means the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

3.5. "Council" means the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

3.6. "Course" means a formally organized, structured series of instructional activities open to the general public for which a fee is charged, and for which credit toward a degree either is awarded or may reasonably be understood to be applicable to a degree with the intent of imparting information or understanding at a level appropriate to a postsecondary audience. Instruction may be in face-to-face meetings or delivered electronically or by other means.

3.7. "Degree" means any earned award conferred by a higher educational institution which represents satisfactory completion of the requirements of a program, or course of study, or any instruction beyond or apart from the secondary level of greater duration than eleven months of full-time study.

3.8. "Degree program" means a curriculum or course of study of greater duration than eleven months of full-time study in a discipline or field that leads to a degree.

3.9. "Distance education" means the delivery of any course or degree programs by synchronous or asynchronous technology. Asynchronous or synchronous technology via distance delivery includes all forms of internet, electronic, digital, online, video, and any other technology driven delivery system.

3.10. "Institution" means any person, firm, corporation, association, agency, institute, trust or other entity of any nature whatsoever offering education beyond the secondary level which:

3.10.a. offers courses or programs of study or instruction which lead to or which may reasonably be understood to be applicable toward an associate degree; or,

3.10.b. operates a facility as a college or university or other entity which offers degrees or other indicia of a level of educational attainment beyond the secondary school level; or,

3.10.c. uses the term "college" or "university," or words of like meaning, in its name or in any manner in connection with its academic affairs or business.

3.11. "Physical Presence" means an actual presence in the state, online or on-site, for the purpose of conducting activity related to: a postsecondary educational institution; educational service; dissemination of educational credentials; enrollment, solicitation or advertising. Physical presence as further outlined for purposes of authorization shall include, but not be limited to:

3.11.a. An instructional site within the state;

3.11.b. Dissemination of an educational credential from a location within the state;

3.11.c. An agent, whether compensated or not, who is utilized for the purpose of administering, coordinating, teaching, training, tutoring, counseling, advising, recruiting, or any other activity on behalf of the sponsoring institution;

3.11.d. Advertising, promotional material or public solicitation in any form that targets West Virginia residents through distribution or advertising in the state;

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3.11.e. Instructional delivery that receives assistance from any other organization within the state in that delivery.

3.11.f. Clinical experiences, internships, or other similar curricular requirement. Activities exempt from this definition include: online instructors residing in West Virginia but having no direct, in-person contact with students and individuals participating in college fairs coordinated by the Council and local school districts.

3.12. “Preliminary status” means six-month period of time that an institution is granted by the Council to satisfactorily complete preliminary information as required by the regional or other appropriate, acceptable, accrediting association. During this time period, the institution shall not accept students, offer instruction, award credits toward a degree, or award a degree until granted further authorization by the Council.

3.13. “Probationary status” means that an institution has been authorized by the Council to enroll students, offer instruction, graduate students and award degrees under the condition that the institution is continuously seeking and making satisfactory progress toward acquiring full accreditation and full state authorization.

3.14. “Reauthorization” is the process by which an institution annually renews its status as an institution authorized to offer programs and courses for West Virginia residents. This status is granted by the WV Council for Community and Technical College Education when the institution demonstrates compliance with the requirements for such status.

3.15. “Religious, theological, or faith-based institution” means a postsecondary institution that offers no degree programs other than those specifically related to the institution’s doctrine. Institutions that offer general degree programs cannot be exempted by this rule as religious, theological, or faith-based.

3.16. “Unearned Tuition” means the portion of tuition paid for which the institution has not fulfilled its contractual agreement.

§135-20-4. Exemptions.

4.1. Institutions that clearly qualify as exemptions under this rule and after Council staff review shall be considered exempt from authorization. Institutional exemption is subject to annual review and/or revocation any time the activity deviates from the original determination factors for exemption. The following institutions shall be exempt from the provisions of this rule:

4.1.a. Out-of-state institutions:

4.1.a.1. offering courses through brokering or other collaborative arrangements with a West Virginia public institution of higher education and which support programmatic offerings of the state institution;

4.1.a.2. offering a short course or seminar in which the instruction for the segment takes no more than twenty classroom hours, and is not for college credit; or,

4.1.a.3. offering courses or programs on a military installation solely for military personnel or civilians employed on such installation.

4.1.b. Non-Degree granting institutions whose programs are designed primarily for job entry or upgrading of skills and are described in clock (contact) hours. These programs typically prepare individuals

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for employment and do not require courses beyond those specific to the job or its field with program length sufficient to effect outcomes.

4.2. Each institution of higher education which claims to be exempt under the provisions of this section must file with the Council such information as may be required by the Council to determine whether the institution is exempt. The written request for an exemption must be received by the Council at least thirty (30) days prior to the proposed initiation date of a course of instruction. The Council shall notify the institution in writing indicating whether or not the institution is exempt.

§135-20-5. Institutional Titles.

5.1. An institution shall use within the state a title appropriate to the program and degree it offers in the state.

5.2. No person, firm, association, institution, trust corporation or other entity shall use in any manner within West Virginia the term "college" or "university" or any abbreviation thereof, or any words or terms tending to designate it as, or create the impression that it is an institution of higher education, unless it shall have obtained the appropriate authorization as provided in this rule.

5.3. This section shall not apply to any institution which used the term "college" or "university" prior to the effective date of this rule.

5.4. This section shall not apply to individual proprietorships, associations, co-partnerships or corporations which use the words "college" or "university" in their training programs solely for their employees or customers, which do not offer degree programs, and whose name includes the word "college" or "university" in a context from which it clearly appears that such entity is not an educational institution.

§135-20-6. Authorization to Operate.

6.1. No institution may advertise, solicit, recruit, enroll, or operate a postsecondary education institution until it is authorized for operation in the State of West Virginia by the Council.

6.2. An institution locating in West Virginia must register with the Secretary of State's office prior to making any application to the Council for authorization.

6.3. All institutions and religious, theological, or faith-based colleges offering any degree above the associate level, as specified in section 7.4 of this rule, shall register with the Council, shall meet the authorization criteria, and shall be granted authorization prior to offering any program of instruction, credit, or degree; opening a place of business; soliciting students or enrollees; or offering educational support services.

6.4. All institutions offering degrees at the associate level shall register with the Council, shall meet the authorization criteria, and shall be granted authorization prior to offering any program of instruction, credit, or degree; opening a place of business; soliciting students or enrollees; or offering educational support services.

6.5. All institutions offering degrees above the associate level shall register with the Commission, shall meet the authorization criteria, and shall be granted authorization prior to offering any program of instruction, credit, or degree; opening a place of business; soliciting students or enrollees; or offering educational support services. Granting of authorization of such institution is the responsibility of the Higher Education Policy Commission.

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6.6. Authorization of institutions offering associate degrees is the responsibility of the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

6.7. Institutions and religious, theological or faith-based colleges shall be authorized under the provision of this rule.

6.8. Institutions which are formed, chartered, or established outside West Virginia and have been fully accredited by a regional accrediting association or by another accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and which seek to offer courses and/or academic degree programs within West Virginia shall be authorized by the Commission to offer programs and courses within West Virginia under provisions of section 7.3 of this rule.

6.9. Newly established institutions located in West Virginia and those seeking accreditation by a regional accrediting association and/or by another accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, may not offer courses or degree programs without Commission authorization to locate, relocate or establish a branch campus in West Virginia. The institution must seek Commission authorization to offer courses and/or academic programs within West Virginia per the provisions of section 7.2 of this rule.

6.10. Institutions wishing to exceed or change their approved programmatic mission must receive approval from the Council to offer each program that exceeds the level of academic degrees that the institution is authorized to grant. Documentation must be submitted that specifies the scope of the proposed change, including long-range plans for new degree programs and programs that exceed the level of academic degrees currently authorized for the institution. Requests to exceed an institution's programmatic mission shall be evaluated based on the following criteria: objectives of proposed program; relationship of program to statewide mission and plan; demonstration of need; effect of new program on existing programs at other institutions; resource availability; qualified faculty and administrators; library holdings and support; facilities and equipment; and, evidence of strength to offer the proposed program.

6.11. An out-of-state institution that seeks to offer online courses and programs in West Virginia and determined to have physical presence in West Virginia is subject to the provisions of section 8 of this rule.

6.12. Before an institution of higher education can be authorized by the Council to operate within the State of West Virginia, a surety bond must be provided by the institution. The obligation of the bond will be that the institution, its officers, agents and employees will faithfully perform the terms and conditions of contracts for tuition and other instructional fees entered into between the institution and persons enrolling as students. The bond shall be issued by a company authorized to do business in the state. The bond shall be to the Council in such form as approved by the Council and is to be used only for payment of a refund of tuition and other instructional fees due a student or potential student. The amount of the bond shall be \$100,000 and shall be renewed annually. The Council, if it deems appropriate, may reduce the amount of the bond if an institution has less unearned tuition than \$100,000, but in no event shall be less than \$20,000.

6.13. If instruction is to be delivered at a physical location within the State of West Virginia, the applicant institutions must secure, from appropriate local agencies, documentation that fire and sanitation codes are met by the proposed instructional facilities. If such inspections are unavailable, the institution must present a copy of a recent letter from the local inspection agency indicating that such inspections are unavailable. Additionally, instructional delivery sites must be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

6.14. Institutions seeking West Virginia authorization may withdraw from the authorization process at any time upon written notification to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

§135-20-7. Procedures for Granting of Authorization.

7.1. Process for securing authorization.

An institution which is interested in gaining authorization to operate within the State of West Virginia must follow the prescribed procedures outlined in this rule to be considered for the requested authorization. No institution shall operate until it meets the essential conditions established by the Council and defined in this rule. Institutional accreditation must be documented or its potential for accreditation established and accepted by the Council. Institutions authorized to operate pending full accreditation shall pursue full accreditation continuously and shall make reasonable and timely progress toward accreditation in order to retain authorization.

When a change in ownership occurs with an institution, the Council shall reassess the institution's authorization status within six (6) months of the notification of the change in ownership.

7.2. Newly established institutions in West Virginia and those seeking accreditation Newly established institutions in West Virginia and those seeking accreditation by a regional accrediting association and/or by another accrediting body must seek Council authorization to offer courses and/or academic programs within West Virginia. Following is a description of the steps in the authorization process:

7.2.a. It is the responsibility of the applying institution to contact the Secretary of State's office to determine if registration is required within the state.

7.2.b. A preliminary conference shall be held between the Chief Executive Officer or designee of the institution seeking authorization to operate a degree-granting institution in the State of West Virginia and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs to the Council for Community and Technical College Education or designee. The agenda shall include a discussion of criteria to be met by the institution and procedures used in applying for requested authorization.

7.2.c. Following the preliminary conference, the institution shall submit a self- study report including all requested documents and materials related to authorization, including those which address the essential conditions in section 8 of this rule as may be requested. An initial application fee of \$6,000 must accompany the submission of documentation for those institutions seeking authorization. The Council may adjust all fees charged as deemed necessary.

7.2.d. Upon receipt of the completed self-study report and all documentation, the Council staff shall organize a compliance review committee to visit the site(s) of the institution seeking state authorization. At the discretion of the Council staff, the compliance visit may take place at the Council office or other appropriate locations. The principal task of the committee will be to verify that the institution complies with the Council's standards for preliminary authorization and to report its findings to the Council. The compliance review committee shall be composed of:

7.2.d.1. Persons who are qualified by academic training or professional experience to verify the institution's compliance with Council standards for approval.

7.2.d.2. Members of the Council staff. The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs or designee shall serve as chair of the committee.

7.2.d.3. The visit will be scheduled at a time which is mutually convenient to the institution and the Council. The institution shall pay the reasonable expenses associated with the compliance review visit.

7.2.e. Following the site visit and review of submitted documentation, the compliance review committee will prepare an analysis of the findings and develop a recommendation for the Council regarding

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the institutional application. Only those institutions whose proposed offerings meet state standards of quality will be recommended for authorization. The report will contain:

7.2.e.1. a report by the compliance review committee; and,

7.2.e.2. a recommendation by the compliance review committee for action by the Council regarding granting preliminary authorization as provided for in section 7.2.h of this rule.

7.2.f. A draft of a staff report prepared in accordance with this section will be provided to the institution for correction of factual errors and comment. The institution may provide the Council a response to the report within ten (10) working days of receipt of the report. The institutional comments will be included with the compliance review committee report presented to the Council.

7.2.g. An out-of-state institution seeking to establish a campus in West Virginia that holds appropriate accreditation as determined by the Council and that meets the essential conditions as provided in section 9 of this rule may be granted full authorization by the Council.

7.2.h. Upon receipt and review of the compliance review committee recommendation, the Council will consider the institution for Preliminary State Authorization effective for a period of time up to six (6) months. Within that period of time the institution shall satisfactorily complete preliminary information as required by the regional and/or other appropriate accrediting association, and shall not accept students, offer instruction, award credits toward a degree, or award a degree until granted further authorization by the Council.

7.2.i. If the institution does not hold accreditation, the Council staff shall request submission of information verifying its accreditation status and/or evidence of "reasonable and timely progress" toward accreditation. Reasonable and timely progress toward accreditation is understood to be a status with the regional accrediting association or an acceptable alternative accrediting association recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (recognition shall be documented) that indicates that the institution has been determined to hold the potential for accreditation and is actively pursuing accreditation within the timetable established by the regional accrediting association (unless an alternative timetable has been presented to and accepted by the Council).

7.2.j. Once the institution has been accepted for consideration for candidacy by the regional accrediting organization and/or other appropriate accrediting association and has submitted evidence to this fact to the Council, the institution shall be placed on Probationary Authorization status. The institution shall remain on Probationary status no longer than six (6) years.

7.2.k. If at the discretion of the Council, satisfactory evidence is not received within six (6) months of the granting date of Preliminary Authorization status, that authorization may be suspended or revoked.

7.2.l. An institution holding Probationary status shall undertake the accreditation process immediately and shall comply with the accreditation requirements and procedures to achieve full institutional accreditation.

7.2.m. Failure to pursue accreditation continuously, as provided in this rule, shall result in loss of state authorization.

7.2.n. Each institution with Probationary State Authorization status shall submit an annual report in a format determined by Council staff. A nonrefundable fee of \$500 shall accompany the submission of the annual report while the institution is maintaining Probationary State Authorization status. The Council may adjust all fees charged as deemed necessary. The annual report should include the following:

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7.2.n.1. any changes or additions to information previously submitted as part of the basis for Preliminary State Authorization;

7.2.n.2. copy of current catalog with major changes cited;

7.2.n.3. the latest financial statement from the most recent institutional fiscal year;

7.2.n.4. an enrollment report from the most recent academic year;

7.2.n.5. a list of all institutional personnel including staff, instructors and agents;

7.2.n.6. summary data on student state and federal financial aid;

7.2.n.7. data on student retention;

7.2.n.8. program completion data, as applicable;

7.2.n.9. status of progress toward receiving full accreditation status from accrediting agency;
and,

7.2.n.10. such other information or clarification deemed necessary by Council staff for determination of authorization recommendation.

7.2.o. Following the on-site accreditation visit and action by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and/or other appropriate accrediting association, the institution shall immediately notify the Council which will then assign the institution an authorization status from among the following:

7.2.o.1. Fully authorized, as a result of the decision by the accrediting association to accredit the institution, and having demonstrated compliance with the Essential Conditions.

7.2.o.2. Continuation of Probationary State Authorization. An institution that holds candidacy for accreditation shall submit annual reports to the Council documenting its progress toward the achievement of accreditation consistent with policy of appropriate accreditation associations. Continuation of this status shall not extend beyond six (6) years.

7.2.o.3. Not authorized as a result of denial of accreditation by the accrediting association.

7.2.o.4. Continuation of Probationary State Authorization status pending an appeal of denial of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Continuation on these grounds shall only be granted upon showing good cause to the Council. An institution's final authorization status will be based upon the action taken by the accrediting association.

7.3. Accredited, out-of-state institutions seeking to locate in West Virginia.

Any higher education institution having its principal place of operation outside West Virginia which holds regional or other appropriate accreditation and which desires to offer courses and/or degree programs at a physical location within West Virginia must be authorized by the Council.

Following is a description of the steps in the authorization process:

7.3.a. It is the responsibility of the applying institution to contact the Secretary of State's office to determine if registration is required within the state.

7.3.b. The institution must submit an application for approval to the Council for each course or degree program to be offered at the site. The application should include written unconditional assurance that:

7.3.b.1. Each course or program of study proposed to be offered in West Virginia has been approved by the governing board of the institution, and if applicable, by the appropriate state agency in the state where the main campus of the institution is located.

7.3.b.2. The institution has been approved as necessary by the appropriate agency, if any, in the state where the main campus of the institution is located.

7.3.b.3. The institution offers degree programs at the level for which credit is proposed to be awarded in those programs in West Virginia.

7.3.b.4. The out-of-state institution is authorized by its appropriate accrediting body to offers degree programs outside the state where the main campus is located.

7.3.b.5. Any credit earned in West Virginia can be transferred to the institution's principal location outside West Virginia as part of an existing degree program offered by the institution.

7.3.b.6. The institution offers the same program at the same level at its principal location outside West Virginia that it seeks to offer at a physical location in West Virginia.

7.3.b.7. The institution presents data that projects market demand and availability of openings in the job market to be served by the new program for which the institution is seeking authorization to offer in West Virginia.

7.3.c. In making its determination, the Council will consider whether the proposed degree programs or courses duplicate existing offerings of other institutions of higher education at the locations for which approval is requested.

7.3.d. Authorization for degree programs may be for a period of up to four years at a specified location with an application for renewal of the authorization required to be filed with the Council at least ninety days prior to the expiration of the authorization. Authorization for courses may be granted for a period of one year at a specified location with an application for renewal of the authorization required to be filed annually with the Council at least ninety (90) days prior to the expiration of the authorization.

7.3.e. Accredited, out-of-state institutions authorized to deliver programs and/or courses for a specified period of time are not subject to the annual reauthorization provision of section 14 of this rule.

7.3.f. The Council may waive any or all of the reporting requirements for institutions that are delineated in section 9 of this rule.

7.3.g. Any out-of-state or private accredited institution that is granted authorization shall receive written notification of acceptable status and will be assessed an initial authorization fee not to exceed \$500.

7.4. Religious, theological or faith-based institutions.

To qualify as a religious, theological, or faith-based college, an institution must qualify both as an institution as defined in section 3 of this rule and as a religious institution based on meeting each of the following criteria:

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7.4.a. Be a non-profit institution owned, controlled, and operated and maintained by a bona fide church or religious denomination, lawfully operating as a non-profit religious corporation.

7.4.b. Limit the educational program to the principles of that church or denomination, and the diploma or degree is limited to evidence of completion of that education.

7.4.c. Only grant degrees or diplomas in areas of study that contain on their face, in the written description of the title of the degree or diploma being conferred, a reference to the theological or religious aspect of the degree's subject area.

7.4.d. Not market, offer, or grant degrees or diplomas which are represented as being linked to a church or denomination, but which, in reality, are degrees in secular areas of study.

7.4.e. Have obtained exemption from property taxation under state law and shall have submitted a copy of the certificate of this exemption to the Council.

7.4.f. Additional evidence may be provided by an institution seeking to substantiate that the institution is a religious institution including:

7.4.f.1. Evidence that the institution holds at least pre-accreditation status with a nationally recognized accrediting association.

7.4.f.2. A statement of institutional mission clearly establishing the mission of the institution as solely religious, and curricula and degree, diploma, or certification programs that clearly support that mission singularly.

7.4.f.3. Other appropriate, substantial, evidence of qualification for state authorization as a religious, theological, or faith-based college.

7.4.g. An institution shall not be eligible for authorization as a religious, theological, or faith-based college if it offers degrees appropriate only for academic institutions, such as, but not limited to, Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, or other degrees typically offered by academic institutions, regardless of curriculum or course content, unless the degree title includes the religious field of study (e.g., "Associate of Arts in Religious Studies"). Institutions authorized as religious, theological, or faith-based colleges also shall not offer degrees associated with specific professional fields or endeavors not clearly and directly related to religious studies or occupations.

7.4.h. An authorized religious, theological, or faith-based college, its educational programs, its degrees and diplomas, and its honorary degrees, have no state approval or recognition status whatsoever. An institution operating under this authorization shall not state or imply by any means whatsoever that there exists any endorsement by the state or by any agency or agent of the state of the education, documents awarded by the institution, or the institution itself, other than the institution's authorization to operate.

7.4.i. An institution authorized as a religious, theological, or faith-based college is not subject to the annual reauthorization provisions of this rule.

§135-20-8. Authorization Procedures for Out-of-State Institutions with Physical Presence in West Virginia.

8.1. An out-of-state institution with physical presence in West Virginia, as defined in section 3, but no physical location within the state, must abide by the following procedures for initial authorization:

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8.1.a. Submit appropriate documentation to discern if physical presence is triggered as defined in section 3 of this rule.

8.1.b. Submit documentation of appropriate accreditation.

8.1.c. If Council staff determines that the institution's activities constitute physical presence, the institution shall submit an initial application fee of \$500.

8.1.d. The Council staff may, at its discretion, adjust or waive the application fee.

8.2. The Council staff, at its discretion, may request additional information from the institution to ascertain whether it meets the essential conditions provided in section 9 of this rule in the determination of the conferral of initial authorization.

8.3. Once initial authorization is conferred by the Council, authorization for West Virginia physical presence may be for a period of up to four years with an application for renewal of the authorization required to be filed with the Council at least ninety days prior to the expiration of the authorization.

8.4. Any accredited institution seeking to retain authorized physical presence in West Virginia, will be assessed a reauthorization fee not to exceed \$500.

8.5. Institutions authorized under this section are not subject to the reauthorization provisions of section 14 of this rule.

§135-20-9. Criteria for Authorization Essential Conditions.

9.1. Essential Conditions. An institution seeking authorization to operate in West Virginia must meet the following essential conditions and accreditation standards established by the Council. To apply for Preliminary State Authorization the institution must provide to the Council full documentation that demonstrates fulfillment of the essential conditions including evidence of a critical and compelling regional or statewide need or demand for the specific academic degree programs(s) in the state.

9.1.a. Familiarity with accreditation and state authorization policies and procedures.

The institution shall provide evidence that it is familiar with and understands accreditation procedures of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association and/ or other appropriate body and state authorization policies and procedures. The statement should indicate perceived strengths and weaknesses with respect to accreditation criteria and assess the capabilities of the institution in achieving accreditation status. It shall state the name of the accrediting association(s) from which accreditation will be sought. If the institution has secured full accreditation status, a copy of the final accreditation report shall be submitted to the Council.

9.1.b. Statement of mission

A statement of mission shall have been developed, formally adopted by the institution's governing body and made public, which defines the basic character of the institution, including a brief description of the educational programs to be offered and their purposes, the students for which the programs are intended, the geographical area served by the institution (or the particular constituency it serves), and a description of how the institution will fit within the broader higher education community. The mission shall be appropriate to an institution of higher education and the institution must plan to award degrees.

9.1.c. Institutional organization, administration, and delivery sites.

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9.1.c.1. A governing board that possesses and exercises necessary legal power to establish and review basic policies that govern the institution shall have been formally established. The board shall include among its members some who represent the public interest and are sufficiently autonomous from the administration and ownership to assure the integrity of the institution. The Council shall be provided a list of the members of the board with a brief resume of each.

9.1.c.2. An executive officer shall be designated by the governing board to provide administrative leadership for the institution. This officer's name, title, current vita, and the address of the administrative office, shall be provided to the Council.

9.1.c.3. If faculty members are employed at the time the application is filed with the Council, the faculty members' names their academic credentials (degrees, previous experience, etc.), and teaching fields shall be identified. If no faculty members have been employed, the institution shall describe the qualifications of the faculty that is to be recruited and the procedures that will be used to find and contract with faculty members.

9.1.c.4. The method of program delivery and/or physical location of course delivery shall be defined. If a program is designed for online delivery, it shall meet best practice guidelines for distance education delivery as outlined by the regional accrediting agency. If the program is designed for traditional classroom delivery, the proposed physical location shall be identified.

9.1.c.5. To assure that instructional delivery sites meet applicable state standards for health and safety, institutions must secure a certificate of occupancy and recent fire inspection report from the State Fire Marshal's office for each instructional delivery site. These requirements are not applicable if delivery is in a public building that already has regular health, safety, and fire inspections upon receipt of last approved inspection. If the nature of the building is changed, additional inspections will be required.

9.1.c.6. Instructional delivery sites must be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

9.1.d. Degrees and academic programs.

9.1.d.1. A degree shall be awarded upon successful completion of an educational program. The institution shall provide a list of the degrees it proposes to award.

9.1.d.2. The planned educational programs shall be compatible with the proposed institutional mission. The relationship shall be described in documents provided to the Council.

9.1.d.3. The academic program proposed for offering shall be appropriately named and be based on fields of study recognized as appropriate for a postsecondary institution. Evidence shall be provided to the Council that the fields of study upon which the academic programs are to be based are, in fact, so recognized. Such recognition, for example, could be demonstrated by the existence of professional literature in the field; the offering of similar programs in already-accredited institutions, generally; and by the existence of professional organizations related to the field.

9.1.d.4. The content and length of the proposed academic program shall follow practices common to institutions of higher education. The commonly accepted minimum program length is 60 semester credits for associate's degrees.

Academic credit shall be awarded upon completion of each unit of the course of study, leading to a formal award granted by the institution.

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Documentation shall be provided to the Council that lists requirements for each degree program including representative course syllabi specifying goals and requirements, course content, methods of evaluation, and bibliography.

The student-teacher ratio shall be reasonable at all times in keeping with generally accepted teaching modes for the subject matter. The institution must employ at least one full-time faculty for each degree program.

9.1.d.5. Any proposed associate degree program shall include a coherent general education component that is consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to its educational programs. The undergraduate general education component shall be documented. General education is defined as follows:

General Education is "general" in several clearly identifiable ways: it is not directly related to a student's formal technical, vocational or professional preparation; it is a part of every student's course of study, regardless of his or her area of emphasis; and it is intended to impart common knowledge, intellectual concepts, and attitudes that every educated person should possess.

The minimum requirement for general education for all undergraduate programs delivered through the traditional distributed curricula is 15 semester credits for technical associate's degrees and 24 for transfer associate's degrees. If the general education component is delivered through integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or other accepted models, institutions must demonstrate that the program meets minimum requirements equivalent to the distributed model.

9.1.d.6. Student access to all necessary learning resources and support services shall be provided. Necessary resources and support services vary by type of program, but all require some use of library resources. Laboratories may be required for some programs. Support services such as academic advising, financial aid counseling, and support for special, targeted, constituencies may be needed. The institution shall describe the learning resources and support services that it will provide and state how they will be provided to students on a regular, dependable basis.

9.1.d.7. Distance learning instruction, when offered, should be considered part of the total program and be judged by criteria as used for sessions and courses offered by the institution in the regular academic year. Documentation shall be provided to the Council that shows that academic standards for all programs or courses offered electronically are the same as those for other courses delivered at the institution. Additionally, any programs that are offered primarily through asynchronous or synchronous technology shall meet the standards of good practice for distance education delivery as outlined by the regional accrediting agency.

9.1.e. Admission policies.

Admission policies shall be consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to the educational program. The Council shall be provided with a copy of the institution's admission policies, policies regarding tuition and fees assessment, and refund policies. The policies shall define the minimum requirements for eligibility for admission to the institution and for acceptance at the specific degree level or into all specific degree programs. These policies and related publications shall provide a true and accurate representation of the institution and its programs when recruiting students.

9.1.e.1. Degree program admission policies must require at least a high school diploma or equivalency for associate degree programs.

9.1.e.2. These policies and related publications shall provide a true and accurate representation of the institution and its programs when recruiting students.

9.1.f. Financial resources.

The institution shall have financial resources adequate to support start-up activities and sources of funds sufficient to ensure that the institution can sustain itself once students have been admitted. An institution shall continuously ascertain its financial requirements, determine its sources of revenue, plan for current and future needs, and budget its resources accordingly. The Council shall be provided with:

9.1.f.1. A current financial statement compiled or audited by an independent certified public accountant. If the financial statement is unaudited or internally generated, a copy of the most recent income tax return must also be submitted.

9.1.f.2. A budget listing all sources of income and all Educational and General (E&G) expenditures and specifying the dollar amounts and percentages for each component of the budget for the preceding three fiscal years (including the current year). A projection of expenditures and revenues for the upcoming year should be included.

9.1.f.3. The institution shall demonstrate that it has the financial resources and planning sufficient to realize its mission over an extended period of time. It shall demonstrate that it has adequate financial resources to meet the following: facility maintenance and overhead; staff and faculty payroll; books, supplies, and/or equipment utilized by students; and general operating costs including printing and advertising.

9.1.g. Faculty credentials.

9.1.g.1. The institution shall ensure that each full-time, part-time or adjunct instructional faculty member holds appropriate academic credentials in the program area or discipline in which the faculty member teaches. Each instructional faculty member shall either: (1) possess one or more degrees in an appropriate discipline; or (2) as an alternative to formal academic credentials, demonstrate competence by virtue of prior experience or academic training, or both, which are related to the field in which the instruction will be offered.

9.1.g.2. The institution shall ensure that each full-time, part-time or adjunct instructional faculty member holds academic credentials appropriate to the degree level of the programs or programs in which the faculty member teaches.

9.1.g.2.A. All instructional faculty teaching in a terminal occupational/technical program leading to the Associate of Applied Science degree shall: If teaching general education courses, hold a baccalaureate degree plus at least 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline taught. If teaching occupational/technical courses, hold either an associate degree or qualify for a faculty appointment by virtue of scholarly or professional achievements.

9.1.g.2.B. All instructional faculty teaching in a college transfer program at the associate level shall hold a baccalaureate degree plus at least 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline being taught.

9.1.g.3. An institution must employ faculty members whose highest earned degree presented as the credential qualifying the faculty member to teach at the institution is from an institution accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Exceptions may be made only with the prior consent of the Council.

9.1.h. Evaluation and assessment.

The institution must have a clearly defined process by which the curriculum is established, reviewed, and evaluated. The institution must provide for appropriate and regular evaluation of the institution and its program and course effectiveness including assessment of student learning, retention, graduation rates and

student, graduate, faculty and employer satisfaction. The results must be used to ensure and improve quality of instruction.

9.1.i. Tuition policies.

9.1.i.1. A tuition policy shall be developed that provides:

9.1.i.1.A. The total tuition for any specific program shall be the same for all persons enrolled at the same time;

9.1.i.1.B. Tuition charges for programs shall be justifiable, effective on specific dates and applicable to all who enroll thereafter;

9.1.i.1.C. All extra charges and costs shall be revealed to the prospective student before he or she is enrolled; and,

9.1.i.1.D. The true and accurate costs of courses and program completion must be published and made readily available to all prospective and current students.

9.1.i.2. Institutions that the U.S. Department of Education has approved for eligibility for federal student financial aid must comply with the federal regulations governing institutional refunds. An institution must develop criteria for refunds of tuition and fees and make them available to all students.

9.1.i.3. For institutions not participating in federal Title IV financial aid, criteria for refunds of tuition and fees must be developed and made available to all students and prospective students.

9.1.j. Financial Aid.

A policy shall have been developed that provides prospective students and applicants with basic opportunities for student financial aid. This information shall include but not be limited to: (1) types of federal, state, local, private and institutional aid offered to students at the institution; (2) description of the financial aid application process and the method for determining student eligibility for aid; (3) methods and schedules used to determine and disburse financial aid to students; and (4) statement of the rights and responsibilities of financial aid recipients. A copy of the policy must be attached to Council submission materials. Information related to student responsibility for repayment of loans and other financial aid must be readily available to students. Consequences relevant to non-payment and delinquent or default repayment of loans must be published and readily available to students.

9.1.k. Library Resources.

The institution shall maintain or ensure via current and formal written agreements with other libraries or from other resources that students have adequate access to a library with a collection, staff, services, equipment and facilities that are adequate and appropriate for the purpose and enrollment of the institution. The institution shall provide clear and concise methods for on-campus and/or remote access of library electronic media resources and there shall be communication to students in a matter to minimize barriers to usage.

9.1.l. Institutional and student records.

9.1.l.1. The institution shall maintain accurate records on all enrolled students. These records minimally shall include:

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9.1.1.1.A. Each student's application for admission and admissions records containing information regarding the educational qualifications of each regular student admitted which are relevant to the institution's admission standards. Each student record must reflect the requirements and justification for admission of the student to the institution. Admission records must be maintained for five years.

9.1.1.1.B. Transcript of the student's academic work at the institution shall be retained permanently in either hard copy forms or in a database with backup.

9.1.1.1.C. A record of student academic progress at the institution including programs of study, dates of enrollment, courses taken and completed, grades and indication of the student's status (graduated probation, etc.).

9.1.1.2. Financial records of the institution must be maintained and open for inspection by properly authorized officials of the Council pursuant to compliance with confidentiality laws.

9.1.1.3. Institutions administering financial aid programs must maintain a ledger and a record of financial aid administered which includes a chronological record of debits and credits which is understandable to the enrollee.

9.1.1.4. The institution must have policies concerning retention and disposal of records and information-release policies which respect the rights of individual privacy, the confidentiality of records and the best interests of the student and institution.

9.1.1.5. The institution shall have a written plan for the preservation of students' transcripts by another institution or agency, as well as for access to the transcripts, in the event of institutional closure.

9.1.m. Catalog and official publications.

9.1.m.1. Official publications of the institution shall reflect the institution's integrity, commitment, and reputation and convey its sense of mission, character, goals and objectives to the public. All information released by the institution must be true and accurate.

9.1.m.2. Official catalogs must describe the institutional mission, requirements for satisfactory completion of degree programs, student policies, information on enrollment, tuition and fees, faculty credentials, academic calendar, student grievance procedure, transferability of credit, and other information specifically applicable to students.

9.1.n. Student grievances.

An institution shall publish and make available to all students the institution's grievance policies and procedures regarding the receipt, investigation and resolution of student complaints. These policies must include:

9.1.n.1. An appropriate time frame for investigating and resolving the complaint;

9.1.n.2. Safeguards that those persons charged with resolving the complaint are capable of making a fair and impartial judgment;

9.1.n.3. Procedures to ensure that a student will not be subject to unfair actions as a result of an initiation of a complaint proceeding; and,

9.1.n.4. The maintenance of records, disposition and other pertinent information concerning institutional complaints for at least five (5) years.

9.1.o. Other criteria deemed to be pertinent.

§135-20-10. Termination of State Authorization.

10.1. Termination of state authorization for those institutions not subject to annual reauthorization.

10.1.a. An institution shall provide the Council with a copy of any notice of warning, suspension, revocation or other adverse action received from any national or regional accrediting agency within five (5) days of receipt of such notice.

10.1.b. The Council may for good cause, suspend, withdraw or revoke the authorization of an institution to generate or solicit students within the state, place an institution on probation, order refunds to students, or forfeit the institution's surety bonds, or take any other appropriate action. Good cause shall consist of any one or more of the following:

10.1.b.1. The institution is no longer making reasonable and timely progress toward accreditation while assigned Preliminary or Probationary State Authorization;

10.1.b.2. Loss of accreditation by a nationally or regionally recognized accrediting agency;

10.1.b.3. Cancellation of the institution's bond by the bonding company and failure to secure a replacement in accordance with this rule;

10.1.b.4. Providing false, misleading, or incomplete information to the Council;

10.1.b.5. Presenting information about the school which is false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive, or inaccurate in a material respect to students or prospective students;

10.1.b.6. Refusal to allow reasonable inspection or to supply reasonable information after a written request by the Council has been received;

10.1.b.7. A final determination that the institution has engaged in conduct prohibited by this rule, and any specified corrective action has not been taken within the required time;

10.1.b.8. Closure of the institution without adequately providing for the completion of students' classes or course work, without refunding students' unearned tuition or otherwise discharged the institution's contractual obligations to the students;

10.1.b.9. Conviction of the owner of an institution for a felony or crime involving administration of the institution or involving Federal Student Assistance programs;

10.1.b.10. Repeated and/or consistent violations of the guidelines found in this rule, particularly in areas such as advertising, fair consumer practices, or operational standards; and,

10.1.b.11. Exclusion from eligibility to participate in the West Virginia Higher Education Grant Program due to one of the following reasons:

10.1.b.11.A. The institution does not have a signed participation agreement in place; or,

10.1.b.11.B. The institution has been deemed ineligible to participate in federal student financial aid programs by the United States Department of Education; or,

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10.1.b.11.C. The Council has determined, based upon audits and/or administrative site visits by Council staff, that the institution has seriously mismanaged higher education grant or other state financial aid funds or lacks adequate institutional controls to manage such funds properly.

10.1.b.12. Failure to submit an acceptable annual report, an incomplete or unsatisfactory annual report, as determined by Council staff and as referenced in section 14 of this rule.

10.1.c. An institution authorized as a religious, theological or faith-based college that fails to continue to meet the criteria for a religious institution shall have its authorization terminated. The institution shall be so notified in writing. A phase-out period of not more than one additional academic term shall be permitted. An appeal to the Council may be filed within ten (10) working days. In the absence of a timely appeal the termination shall be final.

10.2. Institutions that are not authorized but offer degrees and/or degree credits in West Virginia shall be notified by certified mail that they shall cease immediately to offer degrees and/or degree credits. The Council shall initiate appropriate legal action if institutions fail to comply.

10.3. The provisions of section 8 of this rule are only applicable to accredited, out-of-state institutions offering only online instruction in West Virginia and accredited, out-of-state institutions authorized to deliver program and/or courses for a specified period of time.

§135-20-11. Notification: Appeals.

11.1. Once the Council has received and verified the accuracy of information constituting any of the grounds identified in section 10 or denial of preliminary authorization, the Council shall notify the institution and its owner in writing of its intent to recommend denial, suspension, withdrawal, revocation, or other adverse action and the grounds for such recommendation.

11.1.a. The owner of the institution may, within ten (10) work days of receipt of such notice, request a hearing upon the recommended action. Such hearing, if requested, shall be commenced within twenty (20) work days of such request at the Chancellor's office or at such other location convenient to the parties and witnesses as may be designated by the Chancellor.

11.1.b. The hearing shall be conducted by the Chancellor of the Council or his/her designee, pursuant to the procedures set forth in Chapter 29A, Article 5 of the Code of West Virginia.

11.1.c. The Chancellor or his/her designee may continue the hearing at the request of the institution for good cause shown. Continuance shall not be granted as a matter of right.

11.1.d. If the owner or a representative of the institution does not request a hearing within the requisite time period, the recommendation of the Chancellor or his/her designee shall be deemed unchallenged by the institution and reported to the Council for final action.

11.2. At the hearing, the grounds for denial, suspension, withdrawal, or revocation of authorization to operate the institution or other adverse action must be established by clear and convincing evidence.

11.3. Irrelevant, immaterial, or unduly repetitious evidence may be excluded from the hearing. Formal rules of evidence as applied in civil cases in the circuit courts of this state shall not be applied. When necessary to ascertain facts not reasonably susceptible of proof under those formal rules of evidence not admissible there under may be admitted, except where precluded by statute. If it is a type commonly relied upon by reasonably prudent persons in the conduct of their affairs.

11.4. The rules of privilege recognized by the law of this state shall be followed.

11.5. Objections to evidentiary offers shall be noted in the record. Any party to the hearing may vouch the record as to any excluded testimony or other evidence.

11.6. Any party to a hearing may appear with witnesses to testify on his or her behalf; may be heard in person, by counsel or both; may present such other evidence in support of his or her position as deemed appropriate by the Chancellor or his/her designee; and, may cross-examine witnesses called by the Council in support of the charges.

11.7. The hearing shall be open to the general public.

11.8. A record of the hearing, including the complaint(s), if applicable, the notice of hearing, all pleadings, motions, rulings, stipulations, exhibits, documentary evidence, evidentiary depositions and the stenographic report of the hearing, shall be made and a transcript thereof maintained in the Council's files. All recorded materials shall be transcribed. The Council shall have the responsibility to make arrangements for the transcription and provision of the reported testimony and evidence to the parties. Upon request, a copy of the transcript shall be furnished to any party at his or her expense.

11.9. Documentary evidence may be received in the form of copies or excerpts or by incorporation by reference.

11.10. The Council may call witnesses to testify in support of charges and may present such other evidence to support its position; and, may cross-examine witnesses called by the charged party in support of its position.

11.11. All parties shall have the right to offer opening and closing arguments.

11.12. Hearings may be continued or adjourned to a later date or different place by the Chancellor or his/her designee by appropriate notice to all parties.

11.13. All motions related to a case set for hearing, except motions for continuance and those made during the hearing, shall be in writing and shall be received in the office of the Chancellor at least ten (10) days before the hearing. Pre-hearing motions shall be heard at a pre-hearing conference or at the hearing prior to the commencement of testimony.

11.14. Any party may submit proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law at a time and manner designated by the Chancellor or his/her designee.

11.15. At any time prior to the hearing or thereafter, the Chancellor or his/her designee may hold conferences for the following purposes:

11.15.a. To dispose of procedural requests, pre-hearing motions or similar matters;

11.15.b. To simplify or settle issues by consent of the parties; or,

11.15.c. To provide for the informal disposition of cases by stipulation or agreement.

11.16. The Chancellor or his/her designee may cause such conferences to be held on its own motion or by the request of a party.

11.17. Evidentiary depositions may be taken and read or otherwise included into evidence as in civil actions in the circuit courts of this state.

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11.18. Subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and subpoenas duces tecum to compel the production of documents may be issued by the Chancellor pursuant to West Virginia Code section 29A-5-1(b).

11.19. Written requests by a party for the issuance of subpoenas duces tecum as provided in Section 11.20 of this rule must be received by the Council no later than ten (10) days before a scheduled hearing. Any party requesting the issuance of subpoenas duces tecum shall see that they are properly served in accordance with West Virginia Code section 29A-5-1(b).

11.20. Any final order entered by the Council following a hearing conducted pursuant to these rules shall be made pursuant to the provisions of West Virginia Code section 29A-5-3. Such orders shall be entered within sixty (60) days following the submission of all documents and materials necessary for the proper disposition of the case, including transcripts, and shall contain findings of fact and conclusions of law unless good cause exists to extend such time or by agreement of the parties.

11.21. Findings of fact and conclusions of law shall be recommended to the Council by the Chancellor or his/her designee and must be approved by a majority of the Council by vote at a regular meeting, before a final order is entered. A copy of the final order approved by a majority of the Council shall be served upon the institution and/or his or her attorney of record, if any, within ten (10) days after entry by the Council by personal service or by registered or certified mail.

11.22. The final order may deny preliminary authorization; may suspend, withdraw or revoke the authorization of the institution, place an institution on probation; order refunds to students; order forfeiture of the institution's surety bond and disbursement of the funds forfeited disbursed to students injured by the institution's violation of this rule or its enabling statute; or order any other action deemed appropriate by the Council, up to and including payment of loans, interest and other charges in connection with institution loans, caused a student by the institution's violation of this rule.

11.23. All proceedings pursuant to this rule shall be conducted pursuant to and comply with applicable statute, including, but not limited to, West Virginia Code section 29A-5-1, et seq.

11.24. Any relief a student believes he or she was not rightfully awarded by the Council pursuant to this rule may be pursued in any other appropriate forum.

§135-20-12. Notification and Deposit of Records Upon Discontinuance of a Program or Institution.

12.1. If an authorized institution, branch campus, or extension program of an authorized institution discontinues operation in this state, its chief executive officer shall notify the Council of the date of discontinuance and the name and address of the agency where records will be maintained.

12.2. Records shall be permanently maintained and copies may be obtained by authorized parties. Such records shall include but not be limited to information pertaining to the admission of each student and former student and the educational record of each student and former student. Financial aid records of each student and former student shall be retained consistent with state and federal regulations.

12.3. When an institution decides to cease postsecondary education operations, it must assist students to find alternative means to complete their studies with a minimum of disruption, and inform the Council of the following:

12.3.a. the planned date of termination of postsecondary education operations;

12.3.b. the planned date for the transfer of student records;

12.3.c. confirmation of the name and address of the organization to receive and hold the student records; and,

12.3.d. the official at the organization receiving the student records who is designated to provide official copies of records or transcripts upon request.

§135-20-13. Advertisements, Announcements and Other Promotional Materials.

13.1. An institution seeking authorization shall adhere to the following principles:

13.1.a. “Advertising” includes any form of public notice however distributed. Within this definition would be virtually all publications and promotional items and efforts that could normally be expected to be seen by significant numbers of prospective students or their sponsors. Examples include catalogs, bulletins, brochures and other institution publications, signs, mailing pieces, radio, television, newspaper, electronic or social media, or any other form of public notice designed to aid in the institution’s recruiting and promotional activities.

13.1.b. An institution shall use its name as shown in its letter of approval from the Council, together with a complete address, for all advertising and promotional purposes within the state.

13.1.c. All advertisements, announcements and promotional material of any kind which are distributed in West Virginia shall be free from statements that are untrue, deceptive or misleading with respect to the institution, its personnel, its services or the content, accreditation status and transferability of its courses or degree, diploma or certificate programs.

13.1.d. Reference in advertising to accreditation shall name the agency and shall be limited to accreditation currently held by the institution through nationally recognized accrediting agencies as defined and listed by the United States Department of Education.

13.1.e. No advertisement, announcement or any other material produced by or on behalf of an institution of higher education shall in any way indicate that the institution is supervised, recommended, endorsed or accredited by the Council; neither shall it include the name of the Council except to assert that the Council has authorized the institution to operate in the state.

§135-20-14. Annual Reauthorization.

14.1. The Council shall monitor institutional academic quality, an institution’s financial viability, and compliance with the provisions of this rule and West Virginia laws with respect to consumer protection and other matters of state oversight. A reauthorization application must be submitted to the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education by November 1 according to the guidelines outlined in Series 52, Annual Reauthorization of Degree-Granting Institutions.