ALABAMA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION
PLANNING AND COORDINATION
ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

CHAPTER 300-2-1
PROGRAM REVIEW

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NOTE: Proposed changes are visible in this document red text to show additions. Text retained from the existing policy appears in black. The current version of the Administrative Code is available at http://www.alabamaadministrativecode.state.al.us/docs/hged/300-2-1.pdf
OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED CHANGES

300-2-1-02  Review and Approval or Disapproval or Exemption from Review of Proposed Postsecondary Course Offerings in Alabama by Non-Alabama Institutions Seeking State Authorization

Last Amended: 2018

Synopsis of Section: This section applies only to non-Alabama institutions seeking to offer postsecondary coursework to Alabama residents and does not apply to colleges or universities based in Alabama. It sets forth ACHE’s procedures for evaluating program offerings in tandem with the private school licensure process conducted by the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) Private School Licensure Division. It also specifies conditions under which institutions can be exempted from review. The 2018 update expanded the eligibility for exemption.

Summary of Recommended Changes:
- Title updated to include exemption as key part of rule.
- Needs to be reorganized to improve clarity. Order differs enough from existing policy that it is easier to repeal and provide new rule, rather than amend old rule.
- Needs additional terms defined to improve clarity.
- Updates made to review cycle to align with ACCS processes.
300-2-1-.02  Review and Approval or Disapproval or Exemption from Review of Proposed Postsecondary Course Offerings in Alabama by Non-Alabama Institutions Seeking State Authorization.  

NEW RULE

(1)  **Purpose and Commission Responsibility.** Per the Code of Ala. 1975, §16-5-10(14), it is the responsibility of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education to establish policies and procedures for the review and approval or disapproval of all proposed postsecondary credit courses or programs of instruction offered in the State of Alabama by non-Alabama institutions of higher education. The Code of Ala. 1975, §16-5-10(10) authorizes the Commission to make rules and regulations for its meetings, procedures, and execution of the powers and duties delegated to it by this article. These institutions must also be licensed to do business or be exempt from licensing in Alabama by the Private School Licensure Division of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS).

(2)  **Scope.** This section shall apply only to Non-Resident Institutions seeking to offer postsecondary programs of instruction to Alabama residents. It does not apply to Alabama-based institutions.

(3)  **Definitions.** For purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

(a)  **Accreditation:** A formal process conducted by a non-governmental, independent accrediting agency recognized by the US Department of Education or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to ensure the delivery of sound educational programs.

(b)  **ACCS-Exempted Institutions:** Those postsecondary institutions that are granted a Certificate of Exemption from Licensure by the ACCS Private School Licensure Division and for which the System has waived formal licensure application and review.

(c)  **ACHE-Exempted Institutions:** Non-Resident Institutions that are determined to meet one of the criteria for exemption from Commission review and are named in an official letter of exemption from the Commission.

(d)  **Approved Programs:** Programs of study that have been reviewed and found to meet the criteria for approval.
by the Commission.

(e) Authorization: Formal approval to offer postsecondary programs of instruction to Alabama residents. Authorization is generally secured through one of the following processes:

1. Private School Licensure: A formal process conducted by the ACCS Private School Licensure Division to certify viability and legal authority to offer postsecondary programs of instruction, resulting in a Private School License.

2. Formal Exemption from Licensure: A formal process conducted by the ACCS Private School Licensure Division to verify that a private postsecondary institution has met the criteria for exemption from licensure, resulting in a Certificate of Exemption.

3. Membership in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) (applies only to Non-Resident Institutions without a physical presence in Alabama): A streamlined, reciprocity-based process for participating postsecondary institutions to become authorized to offer interstate distance education programs in other NC-SARA member states without individually applying to each state for such authorization, subject to certain limitations. Institutions are approved for NC-SARA membership by their states of domicile, and as a condition of membership, they are required to maintain certain academic and financial standards designed to protect students.


(g) Distance Education Program: A for-credit postsecondary program for which all instructional requirements can be completed via distance education courses. A distance education program may have in-person requirements that are non-instructional (e.g., orientation, practicum).

(h) Main Campus: The physical boundaries of the location of an institution's principal administrative offices. In the case of an institution eligible for Title IV funds, the campus designated by the U.S. Department of
Education’s Office of Postsecondary Education identification number (OPEID).

(i) NC-SARA: The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a national association of member institutions and states organized to provide a streamlined, reciprocity-based process for participating postsecondary institutions to become authorized to offer interstate distance education in other NC-SARA member states without individually applying to each state for such authorization, subject to certain limitations.

(j) Non-Alabama Institution: A postsecondary educational institution, public or private, profit or nonprofit, whose main campus or headquarters is located outside the State of Alabama.

(k) Non-Resident Institution: Synonymous term for Non-Alabama Institution.

(l) Physical Presence: Having a geographical site with an address and location within the physical boundaries of the State of Alabama.

(m) Programs of Instruction (Courses): Any course or sequence of courses for which credit toward any postsecondary degree, certificate, or diploma is to be awarded.

(n) SARA (State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements): An interstate distance education compact coordinated through NC-SARA.

(o) System: The Alabama Community College System (ACCS).

(p) Unaccredited Institution: An institution not accredited by an agency recognized by the US Department of Education or Council on Higher Education Accreditation or by an entity determined to be comparable.

(4) State Authorization for Non-Resident Institutions. The Commission’s review or exemption from review of postsecondary programs of instruction offered by Non-Resident Institutions is a component of the state authorization process conducted by the ACCS Private School
Licensure Division under the authority granted to it under Code of Ala. 1975, §§16-46-1, et seq.

(a) All Non-Resident Institutions seeking authorization by obtaining a Private School License must complete the Commission’s program review or exemption process.

(b) If the ACCS Private School Licensure Division grants a Certification of Exemption to a Non-Resident Institution, the institution does not need to apply to the Commission for program review or formal exemption from review.

(c) Non-Resident Institutions who are NC-SARA members and do not maintain a physical presence in Alabama are not required to obtain a Private School License or Certificate of Exemption and are therefore not required to seek program review or exemption by the Commission.

(5) Requests for Formal Exemption from Program Review.

(a) As a component of its Private School Licensure application, a Non-Resident Institution may request a letter of exemption from the Commission’s program review process, if the institution meets any of the following criteria:

1. It is accredited by a regional, national, or specialized/programmatic accrediting body that is recognized by the US Department of Education or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Documentation concerning accreditation is required.

2. It offers only non-degree programs or non-credit courses.

3. It was originally incorporated in Alabama and is now owned by an entity headquartered in another state. These institutions must have been in continuous operation in Alabama since their inception, with no more than a one-year interruption of operations due to a change in ownership. Legal documentation of Alabama origin must be submitted to the Commission.

(b) An institution seeking formal exemption from
Commission program review must submit an application and proper documentation to the Commission. The Commission will then determine if the institution meets any of the criteria for exemption from review and will inform the Alabama Community College System concerning the disposition of the application.

(c) Formal exemption from program review by the Commission does not exempt Non-Resident Institutions from the ACCS Private School Licensure requirements as established in the Code of Ala. 1975, §§16-46-1, et seq.

(6) Program Review and Approval Required for Non-Exempt Institutions.

(a) Any Non-Resident Institution seeking Private School Licensure that is not exempt from Commission review must undergo a review of its programs of instruction and receive approval from the Executive Director on behalf of the Commission.

(b) As a prerequisite to program approval, an unaccredited Non-Resident Institution seeking a Private School License must undergo an external review of its programs of study by one or more outside consultants chosen by the Commission.

1. The unaccredited institution shall underwrite all costs related to the external review.

2. The program review process for unaccredited institutions shall not exceed six months following receipt of data and information required by the Commission.

(c) The following considerations will be made as to whether programs of instruction can be approved:

1. In general, program proposals must meet academic standards used by the Commission proposals for new off-campus offerings by in-state public institutions and in doing so be in full compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) guidelines or those of other regional, national, or specialized/programmatic accrediting bodies recognized by the US Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.
2. Since the use of state appropriated funding is not involved, the question of unnecessary duplication is not an issue when proposals of non-Alabama institutions are reviewed.

(d) In the absence of unavoidable delays, the Commission will report its approval or disapproval of proposed courses or program(s) of instruction to the System and to the applying institution within sixty (60) working days following receipt of the required data and information forms from the applying institution.

(e) By statute, the Commission is authorized to promulgate a schedule of fees commensurate with the cost of Commission activities related to the programmatic review, not to exceed fifteen thousand dollars ($15,000) and may exercise this authority as the Commission determines necessary with six (6) months’ advance notice.

(f) The Commission reserves the right to conduct a site visit to the proposed location for an evaluation of a course or program of instruction before or subsequent to concluding its review of a pending application. There is no charge to the institution for mileage or per diem payments to Commission staff for such visits. However, in the event that the Commission appoints other education or external specialists as on-site visit consultants, the institution will pay the consultants a consulting fee determined by the Commission, as well as expenses.

(7) Changes to Approved Program Offerings by Licensed Non-Resident Institutions. If a currently licensed Non-Resident Institution seeks to change its approved program offerings, whether by adding new programs or by relocating or modifying previously approved programs, the Commission will review these changes in a cycle to coincide with the license renewal process established by the ACCS Private School Licensure Division.

(8) Period of Approval or Exemption. In keeping with the review cycle for ACCS Private School Licensure, program approval or formal exemption from program review is valid for two years, after which the institution may seek renewal.

(9) Appeals. Any person or institution aggrieved by the action of the Commission in its administration of
this rule may, by written petition filed with the Commission within thirty (30) days after notice of the aggrieving action, request a rehearing by the Commission. The Commission shall schedule the requested rehearing to be held no less than twenty (20) nor more than thirty (30) days after receipt of the petition. The aggrieved party may present written and oral evidence supporting its petition and may be represented by counsel, if desired. The decision of the Commission following the rehearing shall be final.

Author: James E. Purcell; Robin E. McGill


Repealed and New Rule: Filed -- --; effective -- -- --.
EXISTING VERSION

300-2-1-.02  Review and Approval or Disapproval of Proposed Postsecondary Course Offerings in Alabama by Non-Alabama Institutions Seeking State Authorization.

(1)  **Purpose.** Per the Code of Ala. 1975, Section 16-5-10(14). It is the responsibility of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education to establish policies and procedures for the review and approval or disapproval of all proposed postsecondary credit courses or program of instruction offered in the State of Alabama by non-Alabama institutions of higher education. The Code of Ala., 1975, Section 16-5-10(10) authorizes the Commission to make rules and regulations for its meetings, procedures and execution of the powers and duties delegated to it by this article. These institutions must also be licensed to do business in Alabama by the Alabama Community College System.

(2)  **Definitions.** For purposes of this rule, the following definitions apply:

(a)  Programs of Instruction (Courses): Any course or sequence of courses for which credit toward any postsecondary degree, certificate, or diploma is to be awarded.

(b)  System: The Alabama Community College System.

(c)  Exempt Institutions: Those postsecondary institutions that are granted a certificate of exemption from licensure by the Alabama Community College System and for which the System has waived formal licensure application and review.

(d)  Faculty: A faculty member who has a contract for formal teaching responsibilities with the proposing institution.

(e)  Main Campus: The physical boundaries of the location of an institution's principal administrative offices. In the case of an institution eligible for Title IV funds, the campus designated by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Postsecondary Education identification number (OPEID).
Non-Alabama Institutions: A postsecondary educational institution, public or private, profit or nonprofit, whose main campus or headquarters is located outside the State of Alabama.

Unaccredited Institution: An institution not accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education or Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

Procedures for Program Approval of an Unaccredited Institution. As a prerequisite to program approval, an unaccredited institution requesting to offer degree programs in Alabama must undergo an external review of its programs of study, which may include an onsite Commission staff review and will include a review by an outside consultant(s) chosen by the Commission. The unaccredited institution will underwrite all costs related to the external review. The review process for unaccredited institutions shall not exceed six months following receipt of the required data and information forms from the applying institution. These forms/applications can be found on the Commission’s website at www.ache.edu.

Exemptions from Programmatic Review. The following are exempt from programmatic review by the Commission, but are not exempt from the licensure process conducted by the Alabama Community College System under the provisions stated in Alabama Private School Licensure Law, found in the Code of Ala. 1975, §§16-46-1, et seq. If an institution wishes to claim an exemption from Commission program review, proper documentation must be provided to the Commission. The Commission will then determine based on the following Commission guidelines if programs/institutions are exempt from review. The Commission will then inform the Alabama Community College System concerning the disposition of these applications.

Institutions exempt under the Alabama Private School License Law. Those non-Alabama institutions that are granted a certificate of exemption from licensure by the System and for which the System has waived formal licensure application and review are not required to apply for Commission review and approval of courses or programs of instruction. This includes programs proposed by institutions that are members of the National Council of State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) or
any approved successor organization wishing to establish a physical presence in Alabama (includes internships and clinical rotations).

(b) Programs submitted by institutions that are accredited by a regional, national or specialized/programmatic accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education, a list of which can be found on the United States Department of Education’s website under the Database of Accreditation of Postsecondary Institutions and Programs. Documentation concerning accreditation is required.

(c) Non-degree programs or non-credit courses.

(d) Programs offered by institutions that were originally incorporated as an Alabama institution that are now owned by institutions and corporations headquartered in other states. These institutions must have been in continuous operation in Alabama since their inception, with no more than one-year interruption of operations due to a change in ownership. Legal documentation of Alabama origin must be submitted to the Commission.

(5) Once a program has been approved by the Commission to be offered at an Alabama location, it does not have to be reviewed again as long as the location of the program (facility, not city) does not change. Should a program change physical location, it must be approved again.

(6) **Commission Review Criteria.** The Commission shall establish review criteria designed to evaluate the academic quality of proposed courses or programs of instruction. In general, program proposals must meet standards used by the Commission proposals for new off-campus offerings by in-state public institutions and in doing so be in full compliance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COS) guidelines or those of other regional, national or specialized/programmatic accrediting bodies recognized by the United States Department of Education. Since the use of state appropriated funds is not involved, the question of unnecessary duplication is not an issue when proposals of non-Alabama institutions are reviewed.

(7) **Site visits.** The Commission reserves the right to conduct a site visit to the proposed location for
an evaluation of a course or program of instruction before or subsequent to concluding its review of a pending application. There is no charge to the institution for mileage or per diem payments to staff employees of the Commission for such visits. However, in the event that the Commission appoints other education or external specialists as on-site visit consultants, the institution will pay the consultants a consulting fee determined by the Commission, as well as expenses.

(8) **Timeline for Review for Non-Exempt Programs.**

(a) New programs or previously approved programs being relocated to new facilities will be reviewed in a four-year cycle to coincide with the license renewal cycle established by the System for the institution.

1. If new programs are to be implemented at an existing site or previously approved programs are to be moved to a new facility in the midst of a licensure review cycle, the institution will notify the Commission of those changes by letter and the review will take place at the time of the next licensure renewal with the System.

(b) In the absence of unavoidable delays, the Commission will report its approval or disapproval of proposed courses or program(s) of instruction to the System and to the applying institution within sixty (60) working days following receipt of the required data and information forms from the applying institution. These forms/applications can be found on the Commission’s website at www.ache.edu.

(9) **Fees.** By statute, the Commission is authorized to promulgate a schedule of programmatic fees, commensurate with the cost of Commission activities related to the programmatic review, not to exceed fifteen thousand dollars ($15,000). At this time, the Commission will not assess a fee for its programmatic reviews, but retains the right to do so in the future, upon six months’ notice, should circumstances warrant.

(10) **Appeals.** Any person or institution aggrieved by the action of the Commission in its administration of this rule may, by written petition filed with the Commission within thirty days after notice of the aggrieving action, request a rehearing by the Commission.
The Commission shall schedule the requested rehearing to be held no less than twenty (20) nor more than thirty (30) days after receipt of the petition. The aggrieved party may present written and oral evidence supporting its petition and may be represented by counsel, if desired. The decision of the Commission following the rehearing shall be final.

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