

ACJS Academic Program Review and Program Endorsement

Frequently Asked Questions

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How ACJS can help with external review?

Many colleges and universities require academic programs to write self-studies every five to ten years. Some institutions also mandate that the programs engage an external program reviewer to read the self-study, perform a site visit, and then provide the feedback on the state of the program. ACJS, as the only national organization with a specific focus on criminal justice education, developed academic standards for associate's, baccalaureate, and master's degree programs in criminal justice. These standards are revised periodically in order to remain updated, but they continue to serve as a benchmark for the review of academic programs (in the areas of teaching, faculty, students, and administration). The standards themselves, and indicators for compliance, are published on the ACJS website. <https://www.acjs.org/page/ProgramStandards>.

ACJS can assist with program review in two ways. First, ACJS regularly trains senior criminal justice faculty as Certified Program Reviewers and maintains a list of these individuals on their website. <https://www.acjs.org/page/CertifiedReviewers>. The reviewer list should help programs not only select a trained reviewer but find one from their region who has review experience that matches their institutions' needs.

The second way that ACJS can assist in the review process is by recognizing programs that meet the standards with ACJS Program Endorsement.

What is ACJS Program Endorsement?

The ACJS Executive Board voted in 2023 approve Program Endorsement. Associate's, baccalaureate, and master's programs that undergo program review using the ACJS Program Standards followed by a site visit and review by at least one ACJS Certified Program Reviewer will be eligible to be considered for Program Endorsement. The Certified Program Reviewers will report their findings back to the ACJS Academic Review Committee (ARC), who will then report their findings to the chair of the program being reviewed.

- The program must meet at least 85% of the standards, including Standard C.4, in order to earn ACJS Program Endorsement
- Programs that meet at least 95% of the standards, including C.4 will have earned ACJS Program Endorsement and receive special recognition for exceeding the standards.

Does ACJS or any other organization offer accreditation for Criminal Justice and Criminology programs?

No. There is currently no accreditation available for academic criminal justice and criminology programs.

What are the advantages of participating in program review for program endorsement?

- The program will undergo a significant self-study using a set of criterion-referenced standards designed for quality and effectiveness.
- Programs that earn ACJS Program Endorsement status will be recognized on the ACJS website and be given a graphic to display on their own webpages, program letterhead, etc., and this endorsement will be good for seven years.
 - They will be able to report to their administrations and potential students that their programs are in compliance with the standards promulgated by the national organization that focuses on criminal justice education. This distinction will set these programs apart from their competitors.

What is involved in Academic Program Review with ACJS Program Endorsement?

This process involves a few steps. First, programs must write their self-studies using ACJS Program Standards for the appropriate degree level (Associate's, baccalaureate, or master's) as the report template. The standards provide multiple possible indicators for each standard. Emphasis will be on evidence of achieving each standard, not intention to do so. Second, programs must contact an ACJS Certified Reviewer and agree on a date for a site visit and a fee for the visit and report (100% online programs should consult with the Academic Review Committee Chair to request an online program review). Discussion of the fee, travel arrangements, and specifics of the visit are to be handled between the university and the individual reviewer. Third, the reviewer receives the report from the institution, performs a site visit, and issues a report to the ACJS Academic Review Committee. The reviewer will also provide feedback to the university, but that feedback will not include an assessment of the number or percent of the standards that the program met, nor whether the program has earned ACJS Program Endorsement.

How much does Academic Program Review with ACJS Program Endorsement cost?

The cost of the external reviewer site visit is to be negotiated between the reviewer and the individual college or university. The program does not have to pay ACJS any fees..

What are the anticipated results of program review using the ACJS Standards?

The program will have:

- A clear sense of its mission and how it fits within the academic institution.
- A sound curriculum that is designed to meet technological and societal change.
- Clear evidence of program quality and effectiveness based on program outcome assessment.
- The institutional and programmatic resources to maintain program quality and effectiveness.
- A commitment to the integrity standards of the ACJS Code of Ethics.

Is there a list of ACJS endorsed programs available for me to view?

Yes. Once programs go through the process and are found to meet or exceed at least 85% of standards (including Standard C.4), they will be listed on the ACJS website.

If our program earns ACJS Endorsement, do students who have graduated since our application for the endorsement process get the privilege of saying that they are from an ACJS Endorsed Program?

Yes.

Is it appropriate for a new program, or one that has started recently, to seek endorsement?

The assessment section (Section H) of the ACJS program standards requires that assessment data be provided. Therefore, programs should have assessment data for a minimum of ten graduates before applying. Newer programs are still welcome to undergo program review using the ACJS program standards, just with the expectation that they are not yet ready to earn endorsement.

Does the institution complete a self-study for each separate degree program?

Yes. Each program will need to write its own self-study and have at least one ACJS Certified Program Reviewer conduct a site visit. The ACJS reviewers will provide their recommendation to the ACJS Academic Review Committee based on each program that they reviewed. For example, a university offering both a B.A. and a M.A. in Criminal Justice will need to do a self-study for each program, using the appropriate level of ACJS standards, and have two site visits and reviewer reports.

What if ACJS determines that a program has not met enough of the standards to earn ACJS Program Endorsement?

The program will be encouraged to use the reviewers' feedback as a guide for the future. Even if a program does not achieve endorsement, the process will still serve to provide the program and institution with valuable information about where the program stands relative to the educational standards in our field. Programs may be considered for ACJS Endorsement the next time that they undergo a review.

Is the ACJS Certified Program Reviewer reviewer allowed to tell the institution what they plan to recommend to ARC?

No. The reviewer(s) will write their report and send it to the ARC Program Chair. For the 2023-2024 school year, the ARC Chair and Deputy Chair will review the reviewer's findings and confer before informing the program of the results. Starting in fall 2024, the reviewer(s) reports will be shared with the entire ARC for review.

There is currently any ACJS Endorsement program review for Ph.D. programs? What do we do if we want a review of our Ph.D. program? No, there is currently no ACJS

Endorsement program review for Ph.D. programs. Ph.D. programs are still encouraged to utilize ACJS Certified Reviewers for assistance with their periodic self-study reviews.

If a student makes a complaint against a faculty member, the program, or the institution during the ACJS Endorsement program review site visit, can the review team treat the student's statement as confidential?

No. The review team members must share the complaint with the appropriate parties at the institution. If there is an alleged violation of the ACJS Code of Ethics, the complaint will be reported to the ACJS Ethics Committee using the procedure designated in the Code of Ethics. However, for all other purposes the confidentiality of the review and the review process itself remains intact.

Questions Regarding Standards:

If the program is offered during the day and during the evening, is it still considered one program?

If there is one degree program with one name, then the entire program (day and evening, on and off campus) must meet the standards. Evening or branch campus students are entitled to a program that meets the same quality standards as students who attend the program during the day or on the main campus.

What is Standard C.4., and is it the only mandatory standard?

C.4. is the only mandatory standard for ACJS Program Endorsement. The wording of the standard depends on the type of program being evaluated.

For Associate's Degree Programs:

C.4 All faculty in associate degree programs must possess a minimum of a master's degree in criminal justice/criminology or a closely related social science discipline. When a faculty member holds a graduate degree in a closely related discipline, there should be evidence of experience in instruction, scholarship, and professional involvement, related to the fields of criminal justice/criminal law/criminology.

For Bachelor's Degree Programs:

C. 4 All baccalaureate degree programs should strive to have all faculty members with terminal degrees. More specifically, two-thirds of all full-time faculty in baccalaureate degree programs must hold (1) a PhD in criminal justice/criminology or a closely related social science discipline, or (2) a JD and a Master's degree in criminal justice/criminology or a closely related social science discipline, or (3) A JD and demonstrated experience in criminal justice/criminology (e.g., area of practice). When a faculty member holds a PhD in a closely related discipline, there should be evidence of experience in instruction, scholarship, and professional involvement, related to the fields of criminal justice/criminal law/criminology.

For Master's Degree Programs:

C. 4 All master's degree programs should strive to have all faculty members with terminal degrees. More specifically, two-thirds of all full-time faculty in baccalaureate degree programs must hold (1) a PhD in criminal justice/criminology or a closely related social science discipline, or (2) a JD and a Master's degree in criminal justice/criminology or a closely related social science discipline, or (3) A JD and demonstrated experience in criminal justice/criminology (e.g., area of practice). When a faculty member holds a PhD in a closely related discipline, there should be evidence of experience in instruction, scholarship, and professional involvement, related to the fields of criminal justice/criminal law/criminology.

Standard C.4 – Does the use of Ph.D. in Standard C.4 exclude other doctorate degrees such as Ed.D., D.PA., or D.C.J.?

Yes, Standard C.4 excludes doctorates other than the Ph.D and J.D. (with either prior relevant experience or a MA in Criminal Justice/Criminology).

Standard C.4 specifies: “When a faculty member holds a graduate degree in a closely related discipline, there should be evidence of experience, scholarship, and professional involvement, demonstrating a clear commitment to and identification with the field of criminal justice/criminology.” Does this apply only to the Ph.D. graduate degree?

No, the graduate degree is any type of graduate degree. When any graduate degree is not in criminal justice/criminology, the requirement for commitment to and identification with the field of criminal justice/criminology applies in this Standard and all other Standards in which the phrase “closely related discipline” is used.

Standard C.4 – All programs

Standard C.4 requires all faculty in associate degree programs to have a master’s degree. The Baccalaureate and Master’s Degree Standard C.4 requires 2/3 of all Full-Time faculty to hold an earned Ph.D. Does this mean that the other one-third of the Baccalaureate or Master’s Degree faculty can hold a bachelor’s degree?

No. The standards are cumulative and to be taken as a whole. The requirement for all Associate faculty to have a master’s means that all Baccalaureate faculty must have at least a master’s degree and 2/3 of them must have a Ph.D. The bachelor degree is never acceptable for teaching in a Baccalaureate or Master’s Degree programs.

Standard C.5 – Terminal Degree

What is a “terminal” degree in Standard C.4?

ACJS will accept the following:

1. A Ph.D. in criminal justice/criminology or closely related social science discipline;
2. A J.D. and a Master’s degree in criminal justice, criminology, or a closely related social science discipline; or
3. A J.D. and demonstrated relevant experience in criminal justice/criminology (e.g. area of practice)

Standard C.10

Standard C.10 states that: “At least two-thirds of the core required courses for the degree are taught by full-time faculty.” Does this mean that full-time faculty must teach two-thirds of the core-courses?

Yes, it means that programs use full-time faculty to teach at least two-thirds of all core-courses.

What is the definition of the term "core-courses?"

“Core-courses” are the required criminal justice/criminology courses in the criminal justice/criminology program. They do not include supporting courses such as Ethics, Psychology, American Government, etc.

Standard D.3

The second half of Standard D.3 states: “No academic credit is awarded by the criminal justice/criminology program for life experience or for military, police academy, or other professional training.” Does this mean that a program can accept transfer credit that has awarded such credit? Does this standard apply only to credit that would be used in the criminal justice/criminology major?

No, the standard does not allow academic credit to be awarded nor accepted for transfer credit. Yes, the standard applies only to credits that are to be used for the criminal justice/criminology major. The standard does not control credits that are used for general education or institutional electives.

Questions Regarding Technical Assistance and Program Review:

My institution probably isn’t at a point where we will earn Program Endorsement. Is it possible to seek Technical Assistance, or a Program Review from ACJS to help us prepare to seek Program Endorsement?

Yes. ACJS offers services for both Technical Assistance and Program Review. These are less formal processes than seeking actual ACJS Certification, but can assist institutions in preparing for eventual Certification application. Interested institutions should contact the Chair of the Academic Review Committee to seek additional guidance on Technical Assistance and/or Program Review.

How specifically do Technical Assistance and Academic Program Review differ from the ACJS Program Endorsement process?

Technical assistance is provided by trained ACJS Certification reviewers external to the host institution. The purpose of Technical Assistance is to help programs have an understanding of what to prepare in completing an independent self-study leading. Program Review is something generally mandated by universities every 5 to 10 years, and ACJS offers people who have been trained to serve as external reviewers. Programs may wish to be considered for ACJS Program Endorsement or simply go through Program Review and to get a sense of the program’s strengths and weaknesses.