



COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE

CoARC Communication to our Communities of Interest:

Response to AARC Position Statement on Respiratory Therapist Education

Originally Published January 28, 2016 (Revised December 1, 2017)

The mission of the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) is to ensure that high quality educational programs prepare competent respiratory therapists for practice, education, research and service. To achieve its mission, the CoARC holds programs accountable to their communities of interest - the profession, patients, employers, students and their families, practitioners - and to one another, by ensuring that program graduates are competent to fulfill their expected roles. The CoARC uses the *Accreditation Standards for Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice* to ensure that all accredited programs can prepare students to successfully complete the National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) credentialing examinations. These examinations objectively assess the extent to which program graduates have achieved the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT).

On January 5th, 2016, the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) revised its [position statement](#) on Respiratory Therapist Education. The AARC's new position is that all programs applying for accreditation be able to award a minimum of a baccalaureate degree upon student completion of programmatic and degree requirements. The position statement emphasizes that the AARC supports continuing the accreditation of existing associate degree programs that meet the CoARC Standards.

The CoARC acknowledges that respiratory therapists with baccalaureate and graduate education are needed in larger numbers to serve as educators, researchers, managers, clinical specialists, and other roles throughout the healthcare delivery system. Likewise the CoARC recognizes the prominent role played by associate degree respiratory therapy programs. To support the increasing extent and complexity of the skills required of graduates of Respiratory Care programs and the associated movement of the profession toward baccalaureate and graduate degrees, the CoARC Board of Commissioners, along with the AARC, ACCP, and ATS, approved the following change to Standard 1.01 in the *Accreditation Standards for Entry into Respiratory Care Professional Practice*, effective January 1, 2018:

~~An Except as provided in the following sentence, an~~ educational sponsor must be a post-secondary academic institution accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and must ~~be authorized under applicable law or other acceptable authority to~~ award graduates of the program a ~~an associate or higher~~ baccalaureate or graduate degree upon ~~at the~~ completion of the program. For associate degree programs that applied for accreditation or were accredited prior to January 1, 2018, an educational sponsor must be a post-secondary academic institution accredited by a regional or national accrediting agency that is recognized by the USDE. These programs may continue to award graduates of the program an associate degree as long as they remain in compliance with the CoARC Standards.

The intended effect of this change is that if the sponsor of a proposed Respiratory Care educational program is capable of granting only an associate degree (or equivalent) upon completion of the program, the sponsor must submit a Letter of Intent Application to the CoARC Executive Office on or before January 1, 2018.

To facilitate a consensus, information was provided to, and input solicited from, all the CoARC's communities of interest during the formal revision process outlined below. Before finalizing any changes to the Standards, CoARC provided advance public notice of the proposed revisions. The CoARC has also developed an FAQ (see last page of this announcement) in an effort to address concerns and questions from sponsoring institutions, programs, and students.



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CoARC STANDARD 1.01 REVISIONS TIMELINE

March 2016:

1. Blast email sent to all accredited programs and placed an announcement on the CoARC and AARC web sites announcing the first draft of the revised Standard 1.01. Disseminated a call for comment (with a **May 1, 2016** deadline) to all communities of interest* and outlined the procedure for those wishing to provide input to the CoARC.

**Communities of interest include all the bodies within the CoARC organizational structure; related bodies or organizations (the American Association for Respiratory Care, the American College of Chest Physicians, the American Society of Anesthesiologists, the American Thoracic Society, the Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions, the National Network of Two-Year Community Colleges, and the National Board for Respiratory Care; RT educational program representatives (CEOs, deans, program directors, medical directors, site visitors, and advisory committee members); respiratory therapy educators; practitioners; consumers; employers; regulators (licensure boards, state higher education commissions); recognition bodies (Council for Higher Education Accreditation); accreditors (regional, national, and specialized accreditors); Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors; students; and the public at large.*

2. Used the CoARC web site and Survey Monkey to collect data and feedback from CoARC's communities of interest.
3. CoARC Accreditation Policies/Standards/Bylaws Committee (May 2016):
 - Reviewed the data collected from the survey, and from any correspondence, e-mails, or telephone calls regarding the proposed change in the Standards.
 - Proposed revisions to the first draft for review by the Full Board at June meeting.
4. At June 2016 CoARC Board meeting:
 - Held a Standards Open Hearing;
 - Reviewed, discussed, and approved any proposed changes to the first draft of Standard 1.01.

Following June 2016 CoARC Board meeting:

5. Blast email sent to all accredited programs and placed an announcement on the CoARC and AARC web sites announcing the final draft of revised Standard 1.01. Disseminated a call for comment (with an **October 1, 2016** deadline) to all communities of interest* and outlined the procedure for those wishing to provide input to the CoARC.
6. Used CoARC web site and Survey Monkey to collect data and feedback from the communities of interest.
7. At 2016 AARC International Congress (October 15-18, San Antonio, TX):
 - Held a Standards Open Hearing.
8. CoARC Accreditation Policies/Standards/Bylaws Committee (September– October 2016):
 - Reviewed the data collected from the survey, and from any correspondence, e-mails, or telephone calls regarding the proposed change to the Standards.
 - Recommended revisions to the final draft for review by Full Board at June meeting.
9. At November 2016 CoARC Board meeting:
 - Reviewed, discussed, and approved any proposed changes to the final draft of Standard 1.01.



Following November 2016 CoARC Board meeting:

10. Sent the final version of the Standards to the CoARC's collaborating organizations (AARC, ATS, ASA, and ACCP) for endorsement as per CoARC Bylaw 2.05.01.
11. The endorsed Standards' revision posted on the CoARC web site and will go into effect as of January, 1 2018. An e-mail announcement was distributed to all communities of interest.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(CHANGES TO STANDARD 1.01)

What effect will the change have on existing accredited associate degree programs?

Existing associate degree programs will be able to participate in the accreditation process provided that they continue to comply with CoARC Standards and Policies. Programs with citations will still be allowed to continue.

My sponsoring institution has submitted a Letter of Intent application for an associate degree program. How will this change impact us?

There will be no impact on your application as long as the Letter of Intent Application is submitted to the CoARC Executive by January 1, 2018. The process for seeking an Approval of Intent remains the same.

What if my sponsoring institution is in the process of gathering documentation for submission of the Letter of Intent application, but has not completed the application. Can I submit an incomplete application?

Yes, you can submit an incomplete application on or before January 1. As long as the application is received electronically or mailed on or before January 1, 2018, we will process the application once the remaining documentation is submitted. Keep in mind that, according to CoARC Policy 2.021, if the required additional documentation is not received by the Executive Office within twelve (12) months following receipt of the Letter of Intent application, the application will be rejected and the application fee forfeited. Should the sponsor decide to re-initiate the process, a new application and fee will be required based on the revised Standards.

What if my program has an Approval of Intent as of January 1, 2018? Will we still receive accreditation?

Yes. All sponsoring institutions seeking accreditation of an associate degree program that have submitted a Letter of Intent application by 1/1/18 will receive Provisional Accreditation provided they complete the application process for Provisional Accreditation.

What happens if my associate degree program withdraws after January 1, 2018 and we subsequently seek reaccreditation?

In the re-accreditation process, applicant programs are considered to be new programs and must therefore comply with current, applicable Standards. Accordingly, after January 1, 2018, for such an application to be considered, the program sponsor would need to be capable of awarding a baccalaureate or graduate degree upon program completion.

For questions regarding this communication, please contact Tom Smalling, Executive Director, at 631-912-7920 or by email at tom@coarc.com.