



CoARC Communication to our Communities of Interest:

The Accreditation Process and its Impact on the Respiratory Care Workforce

March 24, 2012

The Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC) accredits first professional respiratory care degree programs at the Associate, Baccalaureate, and Master's degree level in the United States and internationally. CoARC also accredits professional respiratory care degree programs offering certificates in polysomnography. CoARC's mission is to serve the public by ensuring high quality respiratory care education through accreditation services. In achieving its mission, CoARC has adopted the principle that accreditation is a process that provides assurance to prospective students, their families and the general public that, within the context of each program's and institution's individual mission, a program meets minimum requirements (i.e., *Accreditation Standards*).

The recent economic downturn has raised concerns by some in our community that too many new programs have opened in recent years, thereby producing an overabundance of new graduates in a number of local and regional settings. The accreditation actions taken by CoARC are based solely on the sponsoring institution's demonstration of compliance with the published *Standards* as they relate to the institution's mission. CoARC accepts all applications for accreditation that fall within its defined scope and meet all accreditation policies.

It is the policy of CoARC to suggest to all those making inquiries regarding new and expanding programs to consider carefully the work force issues that may affect the new or expanding program's potential success. In an effort to address the dynamic nature of the job market on local and regional demands for new graduates, CoARC has introduced a number of policy changes over the past several years. CoARC requires a very detailed needs assessment for initiation of a program. These policy changes are summarized below. For questions regarding this communication, please contact Tom Smalling, Executive Director, at 817-283-2835 ext. 101 or by email at tom@coarc.com.



EXAMPLES OF COARC POLICY CHANGES REGARDING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR NEW PROGRAMS

- November 2008 – The Study Group for new programs must submit a Statement of Support that outlines the need for the program. The Study Group must also provide a detailed response to each of the following:
- a. What evidence does the institution have of need for the program? Please be explicit. (Needs assessment information may be presented in the form of survey data; summaries of focus groups or interviews; faculty, employers, external constituents, etc.)
 - b. What evidence can be provided that there is student demand for the program at your institution (provide information regarding program inquiries, documented requests for the program from students, etc.)?
 - c. Identify local and statewide workforce development needs the proposed program would assist in filling. Is there evidence of local, regional or national need for additional qualified individuals such as the proposed program would produce? If yes, please specify.
 - d. What are the numbers and demographics of students to be served? What is the estimated number of graduates of the proposed program over the next ten years? On what information are these projections based?
 - e. Identify any special interest in the program on the part of local or state groups (e.g., business, industry, agriculture, professional groups).
 - f. Include any other information as appropriate that will support evidence of need for the program.
- June 2010 – Letter of Intent Application developed and required for all new programs. The application requires new programs to show (i.e., needs and clinical resources assessment) a demonstrable need for a program that meets the stated goals and objectives in the drawing area the sponsoring institution (or consortium) proposes to serve with the program. The Study Group must include responses to the following:
- 1. Similar Programs at Other Institutions in Drawing Area:** (A) Describe all similar programs in institutions within the drawing area of the proposed program. (B) Explain concisely the similarities and differences, and why another program of this type is needed in this drawing area at this time. (C) Describe concisely the availability of resources within the community to provide adequate learning opportunities.



2. Workforce Demand Information: Attach relevant Labor Market Information.

The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey is conducted in each county in the country. The LMI system provides five-year occupational demand data by county on established occupations, i.e. those that have OES codes and that serve medium to large employers. This data includes respiratory therapists. Appropriate needs assessment documentation must also include data obtained from the state where the proposed program is located and should include surveys of local employers. Be specific to the state. Do not quote only national trends. When including data, provide the citation (e.g., website URL) for the information referenced. If a printout of data from the LMI system is attached, highlight the applicable lines with marker or another easily visible method. Do not include printouts showing job statistics for all occupations in a region; do not provide unneeded or irrelevant statistical printouts, or articles.

3. Workforce Demand Analysis: Indicate the relation of the proposed program to a job market analysis. The job market analysis should present evidence that there is a viable job market that will preferentially hire those graduating with the proposed degree. In completing this section, consider the following:

- A. Net Job Market -- Are there enough openings locally to permit placement of the expected number of graduates and has the job market been growing or declining?
- B. Earning Potential -- What is the average initial salary and subsequent salary increases?
- C. Program Credibility/Career Potential -- Is there sufficient evidence that employers would preferentially hire or promote graduates with this education and will this preparation permit students to stay current in their profession?

4. Employer Survey/Other Evidence of Need: A survey of prospective employers in the drawing area within which students will be seeking employment should address to what extent the proposed applicant program will be valued by prospective employers. In addition, provide a narrative on the following:

- When the survey was taken, and by what methodology (mail, telephone);
- How many employers were surveyed and how many responded;
- The specific title(s) of the positions covered by the survey;
- How many openings the employer anticipates, due to separations and new jobs (growth), in the next full year and over the next full five years;



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- Whether the employer believes the applicant program as described would qualify students for the specific positions;
- Whether the employer would preferentially hire students who have completed the program.

June 2010 – Signed clinical site affirmation letters from each proposed clinical site stating the maximum number of clinical slots available for students from the proposed new program must be mailed or faxed directly to the CoARC Executive Office rather than included in the application. These forms demonstrate that the appropriate administrative officer and the Director/Manager of Respiratory Care of each proposed clinical site affirms, in writing, that her/his institution has sufficient clinical resources to support its share of the clinical activities of the proposed program without adversely affecting the clinical activities of any existing respiratory programs at that clinical site.

December 2010 – Added CoARC Policy 1.14 (Third-Party Comments). CoARC invites third-party comment on those institutions undergoing an evaluation for Approval of Intent, Letter of Review, Initial, or Continuing accreditation. The purpose of CoARC's review is limited to assessing the institution's ability to meet CoARC's accreditation Policies and Accreditation Standards for the Profession of Respiratory Care. Comments must be written and signed (i.e., not anonymous) and must include contact information. Submission of a comment grants permission for the comment to be shared with the program. Comments should specifically address one or more of CoARC's accreditation Policies or accreditation Standards. CoARC publishes the names of programs seeking an Approval of Intent, Letter of Review, Initial, or Continuing accreditation through appropriate CoARC mechanisms; programs are encouraged to publicize self-study activities and invite third party comment to assist them in the self-study process.

December 2010 – The sponsor must assemble a Study Group composed of individuals from an independent, external, community of interest (employers) for the purpose of evaluating the need for a new educational program in Respiratory Care. **Invitations to the Study Group must be sent thirty (30) days in advance of the scheduled meeting. If the meeting time or location changes, at least two weeks' notice must be provided.**