Planning Accreditation Board’s 2022 Accreditation Standards

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Introduction
The Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) currently accredits 78 master’s and 15 bachelor’s programs at 81 universities in the U.S., its territories, and Canada. PAB is an independent 501(c)3 organization, sponsored jointly by the academy and the profession. The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), the American Planning Association (APA), and its American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) appoint the eight-member board and financially support the organization. PAB’s standards set minimum expectations for programs to meet for accreditation. PAB is recognized by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), is a member of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA), and adheres to the ASPA Code of Good Practice.

The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting organizations develop standards based on minimum thresholds, then execute an assessment process designed to ensure consistent and fair application of those standards across the broad spectrum of degree programs. While standards may be about threshold assessments, programs and institutions are not prevented from doing more. The aspirational outcome of accreditation is to improve educational quality.

Process and Goals of the Proposed Amendment
PAB reviews its standards on a regular basis to ensure clarity, relevancy with the academy and practice, compliance with CHEA requirements, and to address changes in programmatic accreditation. In 2020, PAB created a special-purpose task force, composed of representatives from ACSP, AICP and PAB, to review the 2017 accreditation standards and suggest improvements and revisions.

The goals of the proposed amendment were to:
- Clarify the standards
- Ensure the curriculum and core competencies remain relevant to the profession
- Systematically review and reinforce diversity, equity and inclusion concepts throughout the standards
- Continue to provide a clear and thoughtful framework focused on principles, outcomes, and accountability.

From October – December 2020, the task force conducted six public forums via Zoom to solicit input from stakeholders. The task force also conducted an online survey February 9 through March 12. Based on the feedback generated through those outreach efforts, as well as background data, the task force developed Draft 1 of the Accreditation Standards. With minor revisions, PAB approved Draft 1 of the Accreditation Standards on June 25, 2021.

The first public comment period was held from July 30 to August 30, 2021. The Standards Review Task Force reviewed comments and made further revisions. Draft 2 of the Accreditation Standards was approved by PAB on October 13, 2021. The second and final public comment period was November 1 to November 30, 2021.
The final standards were approved by PAB on February 3, 2022. This year, PAB will revise its Self-Study Report Manual and Template and various accreditation manuals to align with the new standards.

Summary of Major Revisions

- In the Preconditions to Accreditation, the residency guideline was eliminated. The intent of the current residency guideline is to ensure significant interaction of students and faculty, collaborative work, and socialization into professional norms. These objectives are addressed separately in several standards (including 2C, 2D, 3D, 4D).
- Standard 1/ Strategic Planning and Progress was reorganized to allow for a more logical presentation of information. Specifically, criterion 1A is now Strategic Plan, 1B is Programmatic Assessment, 1C is Accreditation Review, and 1D is Public Information. Strategic issues for the next 5-7 years was eliminated as a criterion, but incorporated as an element of the strategic plan. The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment criterion was moved to Standard 4/ Curriculum and Instruction (and is now criterion 4D).
- Strategic Plan (criterion 1A) provides more specificity on the various elements in the strategic plan and process: Mission Statement; Program Vision; Programs Goals and Measurable Objectives; and Monitoring and Evaluation. Monitoring and Evaluation was previously part of “programmatic assessment.” This was added to reflect the expectation that a clearly defined approach and methodology for assessing the strategic plan progress should be in place.
- Strengthen Diversity, Equity and Inclusion throughout the standards. Specifically,
  - The proposed revision includes an updated definition of diversity that is more comprehensive and inclusive.
  - Criteria 2B/ Student Diversity and 3B/ Faculty Diversity have been expanded to specify three elements of a diversity strategy: 1) recruitment of a diverse faculty/student body; 2) creation and maintenance of a climate of inclusivity; and, 3) initiatives to support the success of historically underrepresented groups.
  - Explicit expectation that Program Strategic Plans (Standard 1) include the Program’s definition of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice, and goals and measurable objectives aimed at achieving them. Programs are still expected to identify their own goals – which allows them to incorporate group-specific goals and/or intersectionality. This allows programs to express in more qualitative terms, their goals and outcomes related to diversity.
  - Equity, Diversity, Social Justice and Inclusion are Guiding Values in the curriculum (criterion 4A1) which should be embedded in a range of courses.
- Reconceptualization of criterion 4A/ Knowledge, Skills and Values of the Profession
  - The “values” element is a new criterion “Guiding Values.” The intention of the revision is that Programs demonstrate how values are incorporated in a range of knowledge and skills courses.
  - Knowledge and skills have been reorganized into: 1) General Planning Knowledge in Global Context; and, 2) Skills and Tools for Planning Practice. With regard to general knowledge in global context, the expectation is that global context will be reflected across a range of knowledge courses. The language from the older curriculum components has been incorporated throughout the new categories.
- Areas of specialization have been eliminated from the standards. Areas of specialization or concentrations are essentially groupings of elective courses. With PAB’s continued focus on student learning outcomes assessment, it is no longer necessary for PAB to regulate specializations. The elimination of specializations from the standards should also alleviate confusion related to the definition and requirements of specializations.
**Accreditation Timeline**

The process and timelines for amending the standards, as specified in the operating procedures of PAB, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 25, 2021</td>
<td>Draft 1 of Amendment to Accreditation Standards approved by PAB</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 30 – August 30, 2021</td>
<td>First 30-day public comment period; all comments posted on PAB website</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2021</td>
<td>Draft 2 of Amendment released to APA/AICP, ACSP, and the public.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1- 30, 2021</td>
<td>Second 30-day comment period, including advisory recommendations from AICP commission/APA Board and ACSP Governing Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2022</td>
<td>PAB releases final 2022 Accreditation Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1, 2023</td>
<td>Effective date of implementation of new standards.</td>
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