

DATA COLLECTION: ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION
APPROACHES



ASSOCIATION OF SPECIALIZED AND PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITORS
MAY 2024

Data Collection: Ensuring Compliance with Accreditation Standards - Programmatic Accreditation Practices

About this report

This report is based on a survey of members of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors on their practices related to data collection as a means to monitor and ensure compliance with accreditation standards.

Contributors to this report accredit programs in these professions and fields:

- Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine
- Anesthesia Technologist
- Anesthesiologist Assistant
- Architecture
- Art and Design
- Art Therapy
- Assistive Technology
- Audiology
- Blood Banking Technology/ Transfusion Medicine
- Business
- Cardiovascular Sonography
- Cardiovascular Technology
- Chiropractic
- Clinical Laboratory Sciences
- Clinical Pastoral Education
- Clinical Research Professional
- Construction
- Counseling
- Credibility Assessment
- Cytotechnologist
- Dance
- Diagnostic Medical Sonography
- Emergency Medical Services – Paramedic
- English Language Programs
- Exercise Physiology
- Exercise Science
- Forensic Science
- Funeral Service
- Genetic Counseling
- Health Education
- Health Informatics/Information Management
- Healthcare Management
- Inclusive Rehabilitation Sciences
- Intraoperative Neurophysiologic Monitoring
- Kinesiotherapy
- Lactation Consultant
- Landscape Architecture
- Library/Information Studies
- Marriage and Family Therapy
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Illustration
- Midwifery
- Music
- Naturopathy
- Neurodiagnostic Technology
- Nuclear Medicine Technology
- Nursing
- Nurse Anesthesia
- Nurse Practitioner
- Nutrition and Dietetics
- Occupational Therapy
- Orthoptics
- Osteopathic Medicine
- Optometry
- Orthotics and Prosthetics
- Perfusion
- Personal Fitness Training
- Pharmacy
- Physical Therapy
- Physician Assistant
- Podiatric Medicine
- Polysomnographic Technology
- Project Management
- Public Health
- Public Policy, Affairs and Administration
- Psychology
- Recreational Therapy
- Respiratory Care
- Social Work
- Speech-Language Pathology
- Surgical Assisting
- Surgical Technologist
- Theatre
- Urban Planning
- Veterinary Medicine

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Specialized and professional accreditors

review programs at colleges and universities against an established set of educational quality standards with an end goal that students achieve the necessary skills and learning outcomes for safe and effective practice in their chosen profession. As one method to monitor and ensure that programs remain compliant with those accreditation standards, accreditors collect data on various indicators related to compliance. Analysis of those program data may then trigger the accreditor to take some form of action, based on the circumstances.

This report compiles data obtained in a survey completed by fifty member agencies of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Members were asked to identify the various data that they collect, the frequency of data collection and how information about substantive change is gathered.

For the most part, ASPA member accreditors require annual reporting from accredited programs that include data related to compliance with accreditation standards. A small percentage of accreditors do not require annual reporting, instead they regularly review data on programs that are acquired from other sources.

Two thirds and higher of programmatic accreditors require information on key indicators that includes completion/graduation rates, curriculum changes, and changes in leadership and faculty.

Information about substantive change is collected in a separate report. Among other data points, the majority of respondents identified these indicators as key with regards to substantive change: mergers and acquisitions, additional location, major curriculum change, and legal status change.

Overall, specialized and professional accreditors collect data on a regular basis as a means of monitoring and ensuring that accredited programs maintain compliance with standards.

Report at a glance

The Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) is a membership organization that communicates the value of specialized and professional higher education accreditation and promotes quality by facilitating discussion among and providing educational opportunities for programmatic accreditors.

ASPA members accredit education programs for more than 100 different disciplines, from construction to nursing and architecture to occupational therapy.

Introduction

Specialized¹ and professional accreditors serve a public interest mandate that focuses on education for students to become competent practitioners in their field or discipline of study. These programmatic accreditors set quality standards² that have been established collaboratively with stakeholders in the profession for programs³ at colleges and universities⁴. The expectation is that students completing these programs are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for entry-level practice in their chosen professions.

Higher education accreditation has dual roles of quality assurance and quality improvement. Ongoing data collection from accredited programs is one method that provides evidence of compliance with standards, and indications of a program's success or lack of success with achieving these ends. Data that falls outside expected norms or is indicative of non-compliant patterns informs the accreditor's next steps, which may be to require additional information from struggling programs, to make a focused visit, or to take other actions as warranted by the circumstance.

Regular data collection from programs serves other purposes as well: to inform the establishment or confirm validity of a benchmark, to identify potential improvements or changes to standards, and to signal to the public that accreditors are holding programs accountable.

In the fall of 2023, the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) surveyed its accreditor members to identify the various data that they collect, the frequency of data collection and how substantive change in programs is reported. This report summarizes the responses provided by 50 ASPA member agencies.

Findings indicate that:

- Most accreditors require annual reporting that includes data related to compliance with accreditation standards.
- Of the 96% of respondents that require regularly scheduled reporting, two thirds and higher require information on these indicators: completion/graduation rates, curriculum changes, and leadership and faculty changes.
- There is a separate reporting process required by most accreditors for programs to provide information concerning substantive change that includes these activities: mergers and acquisitions, additional location, major curriculum change, and legal status change.

Frequency of Regularly Scheduled Reports

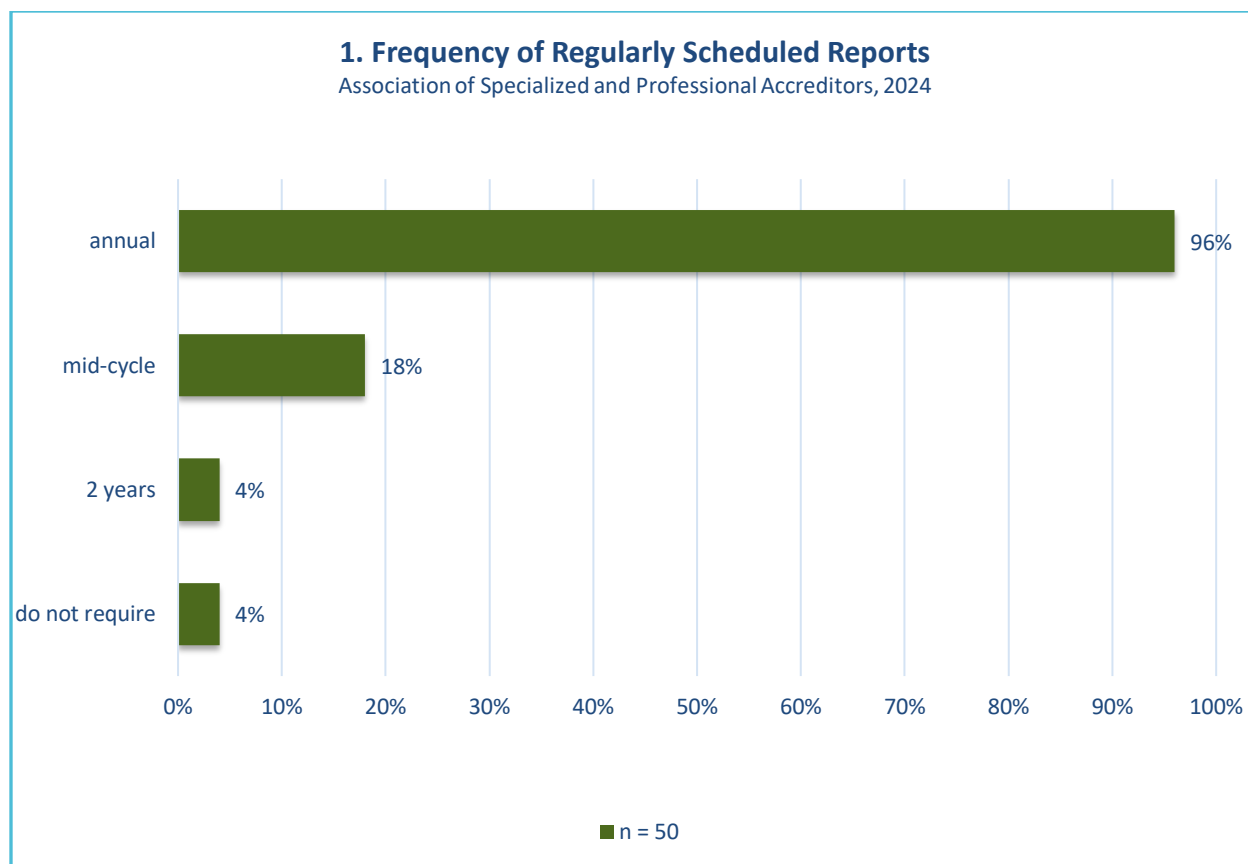
The frequency of data collection from accredited programs is demonstrated in Figure 1.

¹ The terms "specialized," "professional" and "programmatic" are used synonymously in this report.

² The term "standard" is used generically in this document. Accreditors may use other terms such as "evaluative criteria" to denote the requirements for programs to demonstrate quality.

³ "Program" is used in this report for brevity. Several ASPA members also serve as institutional accreditors, for instance in the case of single purpose schools such as podiatry.

⁴ The phrase "colleges and universities" is used for brevity; ASPA members also accredit programs in hospitals and healthcare settings and postsecondary adult education programs in public K-12 school districts.



Most respondents indicated that annual reporting was required of accredited programs. Several agencies noted that additional data was collected more frequently from programs in candidacy status, and in the instances of identification of compliance issues, reporting was imposed based on the circumstances.

Analysis of individual program data may reveal indicators that fall outside established norms or questionable patterns indicating noncompliance. The accreditor may then request more information from the program, make a focused visit, or take other interventions as determined by the specific results of the analysis.

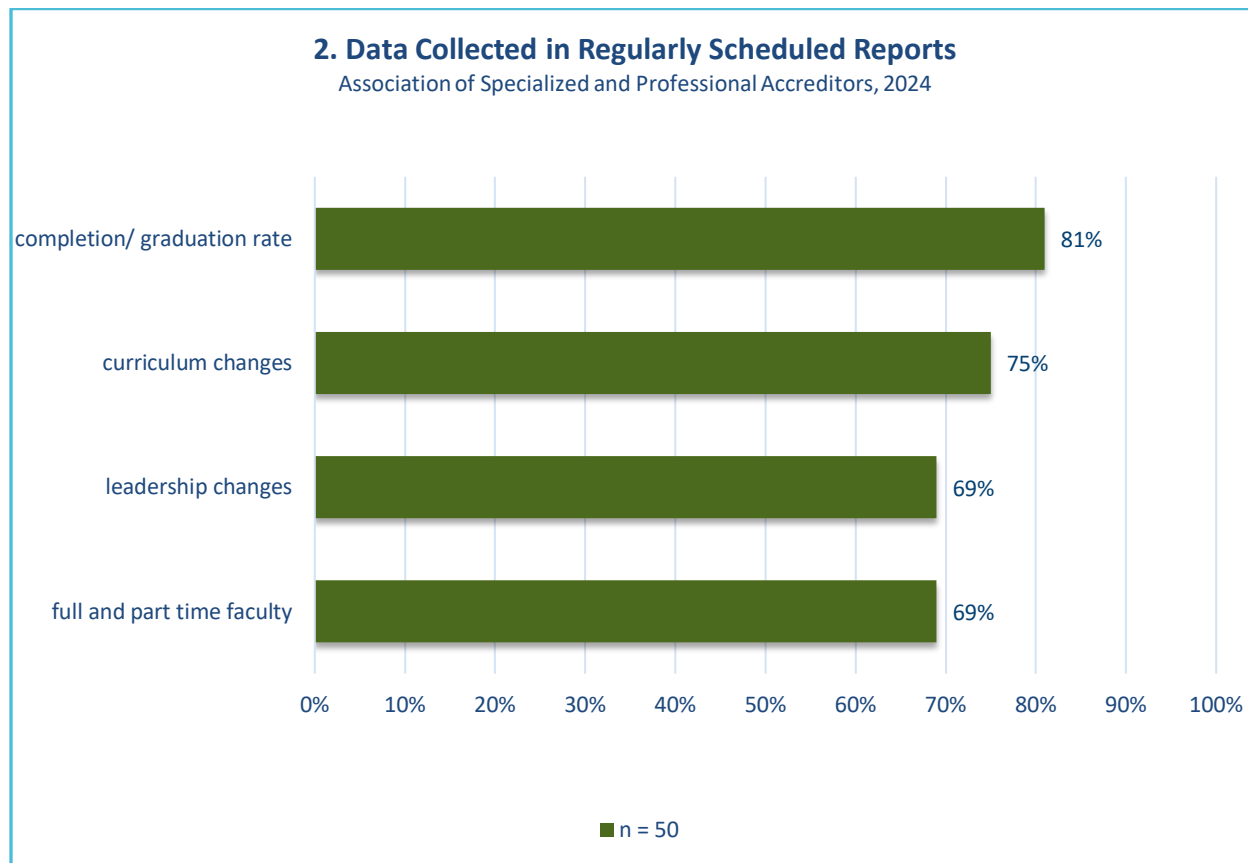
Two respondents indicated that they did not collect data from programs in regularly scheduled reports. One accreditor receives enrollment, progression, revenue, and national licensing data annually from various sources. From their analyses of these data, programs falling below established and published thresholds are asked to reply to the decision-making body's concerns. Thus, annual reporting is not required, but each program has key parameters reviewed annually, which may or may not trigger further inquiry from the accreditor and reporting by the program. The second agency annually requires all programs to complete an audit of their program record (profile) on an online form to ensure their record is accurate. Programs can also update their record anytime a change occurs. Certain updates may trigger the accreditor to take some form of action.

Method of Data Collection

Data are collected in reports that are submitted by regular post or email submission of electronic documents (16/48 or 33%) or through an online system (32/48 or 67%). Seven agencies in the former category are exploring or in the process of establishing an online system for data submission.

Data Collected in Regularly Scheduled Reports

Figure 2 demonstrates the data collected by 69% and higher of respondents in regularly scheduled reporting.



There are over 100 distinct disciplines represented among the ASPA membership. Each discipline decides within its individual context what data is important to collect on a regular basis. In addition to the indicators identified above, these data are collected to varying degrees among survey respondents:

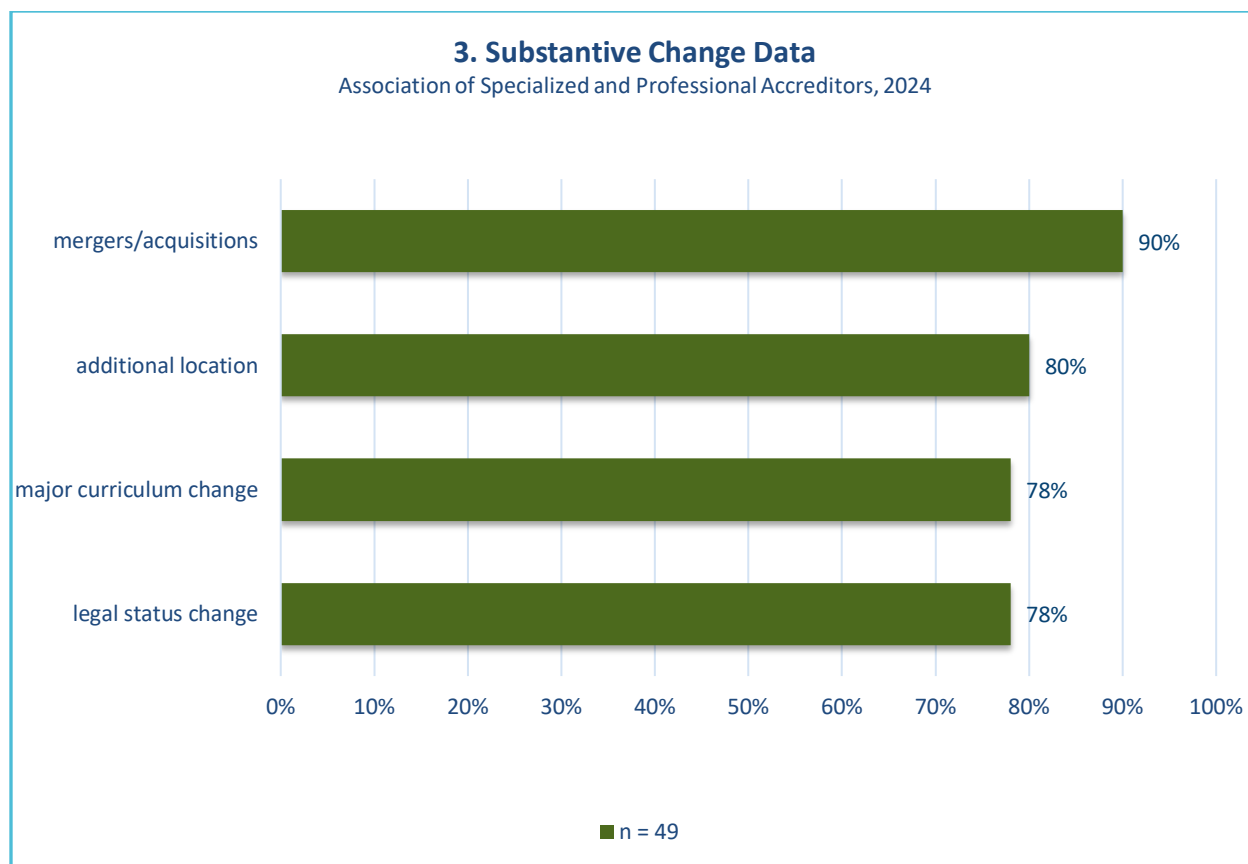
- programmatic accreditation status
- progress report due date
- date of next programmatic onsite visit
- institutional accreditor
- institutional accreditation status
- institutional progress report due date
- date of next institutional onsite visit
- program mission
- changes to program mission
- parent institution mission
- changes to parent mission
- changes in state licensing for school operation
- strategic plan and status
- evaluation plan for determining achievement of mission and objectives
- DEI efforts

- complaints
- program expectations for research/scholarly activity
- research/scholarly productivity
- description of changes in relationship between program and parent institution (budget/resource allocation, personnel policies, lines of accountability)
- changes in governing body
- changes in key program positions
- changes in program support staff
- changes in program leadership
- changes in curriculum (content, delivery methods, etc.)
- changes in practical placements (content, availability, delivery methods)
- # of practical sites/facilities
- distance education
- link for program catalog
- link for student achievement data
- licensing/certification exam success rate
- definitions of full time and part-time faculty
- changes in support of faculty
- changes in faculty organization, governance, policies, evaluation, professional development
- determination of sufficiency of faculty
- faculty additions
- faculty separations
- open faculty positions
- faculty demographics
- # of full-time faculty
- # of part-time faculty
- # of adjunct faculty
- student to faculty ratios
- total students per cohort
- # of student applications
- # of students accepted
- # of student transfers
- # of students withdrawing from program
- # of student dismissals
- # of students on academic warning and/or probation
- student attrition for academic reasons
- student attrition for other reasons
- completion/ graduation rate
- # of semesters to complete
- enrollment trend analysis
- employment/placement rate
- student demographics
- student indebtedness per graduating class
- resource changes affecting the program (facilities, equipment, library)
- financial challenges
- plans to address financial challenges
- # of students receiving financial aid
- types of financial aid
- student default rate
- financial audit and management letter
- Title IV audit confirmation
- program assessment plan
- assessment methods
- assessment data collected
- results of outcomes collected
- changes made based on outcomes results

Substantive Change Data

Substantive change can be defined as any change that could adversely affect the accreditation status of a program. Forty-two survey respondents (84%) indicated that there is a separate reporting requirement for substantive change.

Figure 3 displays the data collected by 78% and higher of respondents on substantive change in accredited programs.



Other indicators that would be classified as substantive change include:

- location change
- administrative structure
- faculty composition and size
- teaching affiliations
- increase/decrease in student enrollment
- course additions/deletions

Limitations of this Analysis

The findings for this work are reported based on the wording of the survey questions. There is a broad array of practices, organizational structures, and usage of terminology across accreditors for the diverse professions represented by the respondents. With such diversity among accrediting agencies, all survey queries may not have been interpreted in the same manner by all participants.

Conclusion

Specialized and professional accreditors set quality standards so that students who complete programs at colleges and universities are prepared to practice safely and effectively in their chosen profession. Stakeholders can be assured that as part of the quality assurance and quality improvement processes, programmatic accreditors regularly collect data from programs to monitor and ensure compliance with standards, and ultimately protect students and the public.