

Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors

Position Statement – March 2025

Professional Competence Includes Cultural Competence

Programmatic accreditors work to protect the public interest.

Specialized and professional accreditors (also known as programmatic accreditors) work to safeguard the public interest by setting educational standards that help ensure graduates of accredited programs are competent and capable practitioners in their chosen professions or disciplines. For example, in healthcare, accounting, and education, consumers can be confident that they are receiving high-quality services anywhere in the United States based on standards established by experts in the field. Accreditors assure that the curriculum of professional programs is aligned with the competencies required by the relevant profession.

Competencies for a profession are established by subject matter experts in that profession.

Programmatic accreditation standards and processes are developed with input from expert stakeholders in the profession, including practitioners, employers and industry representatives, educators, professional associations, and other communities of interest. These members of the profession are best equipped to determine what students need to know and do to be successful practitioners upon program completion. In most professions, cultural competence is key as practitioners interact with individuals and populations with different life experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds.

Competent practitioners are important for a strong economy.

Students should be prepared to engage safely and effectively with individuals and communities from many different backgrounds. Regardless of the profession, it is essential that practitioners possess professional and cultural competence to be successful in a heterogeneous and global society. Curriculum content that includes learning about different ethnic and societal groups and their characteristics is not racism or discrimination, rather it is critical to providing expert care and services to specific populations. For example, healthcare workers must know that certain diseases disproportionately affect different demographic groups, and business professionals must recognize how cultural norms influence consumer preferences, communication styles, and ethical considerations in a global marketplace.

Curricula are determined by programs in alignment with programmatic accreditation requirements.

Professional programs and programmatic accreditors draw on research and use input from professional communities of interest and the public to decide what should be taught in professional programs. To enter a specific profession, it is imperative for students to have acquired the competencies identified as necessary by that profession.

ASPA is committed to the principle that to protect the public interest, the identification and teaching of required competencies must be determined by the professions and their respective accreditors.

About ASPA

A nonprofit organization, the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors provides a collaborative forum dedicated to assuring the quality of programmatic (i.e., specialized and professional) higher education programs and schools. It is the only unified, national voice that represents programmatic accrediting bodies in the United States.

ASPA's 60+ accreditor members set national standards for more than 25,000 programs in over 100 different disciplines and professions such as nursing, architecture, physical therapy and engineering. They ensure students receive a quality education, consistent with standards for entry or advanced practice. With an emphasis on peer (subject matter expert) review and self-evaluation, accreditation plays an important role in continuous quality improvement in higher education.

ASPA member organizations are committed to uphold standards that are rigorous, comprehensive, and outcome-based, with specific attention directed to the professional or special purpose curriculum.



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