

CHAPTER 24  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCREDITATION

**281—24.1(260C) Purpose.** As set forth in Iowa Code section 260C.1, the purpose of accreditation of Iowa's community colleges is to confirm that each college is offering, to the greatest extent possible, educational opportunities and services, when applicable, but not be limited to:

1. The first two years of college work including preprofessional education.
2. Career and technical training.
3. Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers.
4. Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age.
5. Programs for all students of high school age, who may best serve themselves by enrolling for career and technical training, while also enrolled in a local high school, public or private.
6. Programs for students of high school age to provide advanced college placement courses not taught at a student's high school while the student is also enrolled in the high school.
7. Student personnel services.
8. Community services.
9. Career and technical education for persons who have academic, socioeconomic, or other disabilities which prevent succeeding in regular career and technical education programs.
10. Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens.
11. Career and technical training for persons who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school.
12. Developmental education for persons who are academically or personally underprepared to succeed in their program of study.

[ARC 8644B, IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10]

**281—24.2(260C) Scope.** Each community college is subject to accreditation by the state board of education, as provided in Iowa Code section 260C.47. The state board of education shall grant accreditation if a community college meets the standards established in this chapter.

**281—24.3(260C) Definitions.** For purposes of interpreting rule 281—24.5(260C), the following definitions shall apply:

*“Applied liberal arts and sciences course.”* An applied liberal arts and sciences course is a course that is classified as arts and sciences in Iowa's common course numbering system and that primarily consists of hands-on or occupational skill development, including but not limited to accounting, ceramics, criminal investigation, dance, drama, music, photography, and physical education.

*“Department.”* Department refers to the Iowa department of education.

*“Director.”* Director refers to the director of the department.

*“Field of instruction.”* Field of instruction indicates the discipline or occupational area within which an instructor teaches, which aligns with the content of the course being taught as indicated by the course prefix, title, or description.

*“Full-time instructor.”* An instructor is considered to be full-time if the community college board of directors designates the instructor as full-time. Determination of full-time status shall be based on local board-approved contracts.

*“Higher Learning Commission.”* The Higher Learning Commission is the regional accrediting authority recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Iowa Code sections 260C.47 and 260C.48 require that the state accreditation process be integrated with that of the Higher Learning Commission.

*“Joint enrollment.”* Joint enrollment refers to any community college credit course offered to students enrolled in a secondary school. Courses offered for joint enrollment include courses delivered through contractual agreements between school districts and community colleges, courses delivered through the postsecondary enrollment options program, and college credit courses taken independently by tuition-paying secondary school students.

*“Qualifying graduate field or major.”* A qualifying graduate field or major represents an academic discipline in which an instructor must have earned credit in order to teach courses in specified fields of instruction.

*“Relevant tested experience.”* Relevant tested experience refers to the breadth, depth, and currency of work experience outside of the classroom in real-world situations relevant to the field of instruction. [ARC 8644B, IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10; ARC 2945C, IAB 2/15/17, effective 3/22/17]

**281—24.4(260C) Accreditation components and criteria—Higher Learning Commission.** In order to be accredited by the state board of education and maintain accreditation status, a community college must meet the accreditation criteria of the Higher Learning Commission and additional state standards. Documents and materials provided in accordance with the accreditation requirements of the Higher Learning Commission shall also be provided to the department for the state accreditation process. [ARC 8644B, IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10; ARC 0015C, IAB 2/22/12, effective 3/28/12]

**281—24.5(260C) Accreditation components and criteria—additional state standards.** To be granted accreditation by the state board of education, an Iowa community college shall also meet additional standards pertaining to minimum or quality assurance standards for faculty (Iowa Code section 260C.48(1)); faculty load (Iowa Code section 260C.48(2)); special needs and protected classes (Iowa Code section 260C.48(3)); career and technical education program evaluation (Iowa Code section 258.4(7)); facilities, parking lots and roads; strategic planning; quality faculty plan (Iowa Code section 260C.36); and senior year plus programs (Iowa Code chapter 261E).

**24.5(1) Faculty.**

a. Community college-employed instructors who teach college credit courses shall meet minimum standards and institutional quality faculty plan requirements. Standards shall at a minimum require that all community college instructors meet the following requirements:

(1) Instructors teaching courses in the area of career and technical education shall be registered, certified, or licensed in the occupational area in which the state requires registration, certification, or licensure and shall meet at least one of the following qualifications:

1. Possess a baccalaureate degree or higher in the field of instruction in which the instructor teaches classes, or possess a baccalaureate degree in any area of study if at least 18 of the credit hours completed were in the career and technical field of instruction in which the instructor teaches classes.

2. Possess an associate degree in the career and technical education field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching, if such degree is considered terminal for that field of instruction, and have at least 3,000 hours of recent and relevant work experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes.

3. Have special training and at least 6,000 hours of relevant tested experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes if the instructor possesses less than a baccalaureate degree in the area or related area of study or occupational area in which the instructor is teaching classes and the instructor does not meet the requirements of subparagraph 24.5(1)“a”(2).

(2) For purposes of paragraphs 24.5(1)“a”(1)“2” and “3,” if the instructor is a licensed practitioner who holds a career and technical endorsement under Iowa Code chapter 272, relevant work experience in the occupational area includes, but is not limited to, classroom instruction in a career and technical education subject area offered by a school district or accredited nonpublic school.

(3) Instructors in the area of arts and sciences shall meet one of the following qualifications:

1. Possess a master’s degree or higher from an accredited graduate school in each field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes.

2. Possess a master’s degree or higher from an accredited graduate school and have completed a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in a combination of the qualifying graduate fields identified as related to the field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes. These 18 graduate semester hours must include at least 6 credits in the specific course content being taught, with at least 12 credits required for courses that serve as prerequisites for junior-level courses at transfer institutions.

3. For courses identified as applied liberal arts and sciences, possess at least a bachelor's degree and a combination of formal training and professional tested experience equivalent to 6,000 hours. The instructor shall hold the appropriate registration, certification, or licensure in occupational areas in which such credential is necessary for practice.

For purposes of this subparagraph, "accredited" means that an institution of higher education meets the standards established by an accrediting agency recognized under 34 CFR Part 602 and by Title IV of the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 110-315.

*b.* Developmental education and noncredit instructors are not subject to standards under this subrule. Adult education instructors shall meet minimum standards set forth in rule 281—23.6(260C).

*c.* A faculty standards council shall be convened by the department to review procedures for establishing and reviewing minimum instructor qualifications and definitions for "field of instruction," "applied liberal arts and sciences courses," "qualifying graduate field or major," and "relevant tested experience." Definitions shall be based on accepted practices of regionally accredited two- and four-year institutions of higher education.

(1) The council shall include faculty and academic administrators and meet at least annually. The council shall make recommendations to a committee consisting of the chief academic officers of Iowa's 15 community colleges. The committee shall adopt definitions and minimum faculty qualification standards to be utilized for the state accreditation process. Each community college shall adhere to the adopted definitions and minimum faculty qualification standards.

(2) When utilizing relevant tested experience to qualify an instructor to teach classes within a specific field of instruction, each community college shall maintain well-defined policies, procedures, and documentation in alignment with the adopted definitions and minimum faculty qualification standards. This documentation shall demonstrate that the instructor possesses the experience and expertise necessary to teach in the specified field of instruction and is current in the instructor's discipline. When tested experience is assessed, an hour of relevant work is equal to 60 minutes and one full-time year of relevant work is equal to 2,000 hours.

**24.5(2) Faculty load.**

*a. Arts and sciences.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in arts and sciences courses shall be 15 credit hours within a traditional semester or the equivalent and shall not exceed a maximum of 16 credit hours within a traditional semester or the equivalent. An instructor may also have an additional teaching assignment beyond the maximum academic workload, provided the instructor and the community college administration mutually consent to this additional assignment and the total workload does not exceed the equivalent of 22 credit hours within a traditional semester or the equivalent.

*b. Career and technical education.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in career and technical education programs shall not exceed an aggregate of 30 hours per week or the equivalent. An instructor may also teach the equivalent of an additional 3 credit hours, provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment. When the teaching assignment includes classroom subjects (nonlaboratory), consideration shall be given to establishing the teaching load more in conformity with that of paragraph 24.5(2) "a."

**24.5(3) Special needs and protected classes.** Community colleges shall provide equal access to the full range of program offerings and services including, but not limited to, recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulations. Students with disabilities shall be given access to the full range of program offerings at a college through reasonable accommodations.

**24.5(4) Career and technical education evaluation.** The director of the department shall ensure that Iowa's community colleges annually review at least 20 percent of approved career and technical education programs. The community college career and technical program review and evaluation system must ensure that the programs:

- a.* Are compatible with educational reform efforts.
- b.* Are capable of responding to technological change and innovation.

- c. Meet educational needs of the students and employment community, including students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulations.
- d. Enable students enrolled to perform the minimum competencies independently.
- e. Are articulated/integrated with the total school curriculum.
- f. Enable students with a secondary career and technical background to pursue other educational interests in a postsecondary setting, if desired.
- g. Provide students with support services and eliminate access barriers to education and employment for students with special education needs or protected by state or federal civil rights regulations.

**24.5(5) Facilities, parking lots and roads.**

a. *Facilities master planning.* Each community college shall present evidence of adequate planning, including a board-approved facilities plan. Planning includes tentative program approval, a master campus plan, written educational specifications, site plot showing location of proposed and existing facilities, elevations and floor plans.

b. *Accessibility and safety.* All new or remodeled facilities (buildings and programs offered in such facilities) and services in such facilities shall be made functional and usable for persons with special needs and shall comply with Iowa Code chapter 104A and the Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101, and address issues of campus safety and security as required by Iowa Code chapter 260C and by the federal Clery Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1092(f). All parking areas and roads shall comply with all state and federal rules and regulations dealing with roads, parking ramps, and accessibility requirements.

c. *Adequate facilities.* All administrative facilities, classrooms, laboratories, and related facilities shall be educationally adequate for the purpose for which they are designed.

d. *Library or learning resource center.* A library or learning resource center shall be planned as part of the master campus plan and space made for library or learning resource center services within the initial construction. The library or learning resource center shall be adequately staffed with qualified professionals and skilled nonprofessional personnel. The library or learning resource center materials collection of a community college shall be accessible and adequate in size and scope to serve effectively the number and variety of programs offered and the number of students enrolled, including students enrolled at distance and satellite sites. The library or learning resource center materials shall show evidence of having been selected by faculty as well as professional library or learning resource staff and shall be kept up-to-date. The budget of the library or learning resource center shall be appropriate for the programs and services offered by the community college.

e. *Student center.* An area of the college shall be provided where students may gather informally and where food is available.

**24.5(6) Strategic planning.** The community college shall prepare a strategic plan at least once every five years to guide the college and its decision making.

**24.5(7) Quality faculty plan.** The community college shall establish a quality faculty committee consisting of instructors and administrators to develop and maintain a plan for hiring and developing quality faculty. The committee shall have equal representatives of arts and sciences and career and technical faculty with no more than a simple majority of members of the same gender. Faculty shall be appointed by the certified employee organization representing faculty, if any, and administrators shall be appointed by the college's administration. If no faculty-certified employee organization representing faculty exists, the faculty shall be appointed by administration pursuant to Iowa Code section 260C.48(4). The committee shall submit the plan to the board of directors for consideration, approval and submittal to the department of education. Standards relating to quality assurance of faculty and ongoing quality professional development shall be the accreditation standards of similar accredited institutions of higher education that are consistent with the standards established pursuant to this rule and the faculty standards required under specific programs offered by the community college that are accredited by other accrediting agencies. For purposes of this subrule, "accredited" means that an institution of higher education meets the standards established by an accrediting agency recognized under 34 CFR Part 602 and by Title IV of the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 110-315.

a. For purposes of this subrule, the following definitions shall apply.

(1) “Counselor” means those who are classified as counselors as defined in the college’s collective bargaining agreement or written policy.

(2) “Media specialist” means those who are classified as media specialists as defined in the college’s collective bargaining agreement or written policy.

b. The institutional quality faculty plan is applicable to all community college-employed faculty teaching college credit courses, counselors, and media specialists. The plan requirements may be differentiated for each type of employee. The plan shall include, at a minimum, each of the following components:

(1) Plan maintenance. The quality faculty committee shall submit proposed plan modifications to the board of directors for consideration and approval. It is recommended that the plan be updated at least annually.

(2) A determination of the faculty and staff to be included in the plan including, but not limited to, all instructors teaching college credit courses, counselors, and media specialists.

(3) Orientation for new faculty. It is recommended that new faculty orientation be initiated within six months from the hiring date. It is recommended that the orientation of new faculty be flexible to meet current and future needs and provide options other than structured college courses for faculty to improve teaching strategies, curriculum development and evaluation strategies. It is recommended that the college consider developing a faculty mentoring program.

(4) Continuing professional development for faculty. It is recommended that the plan clearly specify required components including time frame for continuing professional development for faculty. It is recommended that the plan include the number of hours, courses, workshops, professional and academic conferences or other experiences such as industry internships, cooperatives and exchange programs that faculty may use for continuing professional development. It is recommended that the plan include prescribed and elective topics such as discipline-specific content and educational trends and research. Examples of topics that may be considered include dealing with the complexities of learners, skills in teaching adults, curriculum development, assessment, evaluation, enhancing students’ retention and success, reaching nontraditional and minority students, improving skills in implementing technology and applied learning, leadership development, and issues unique to a particular college. The institutional quality faculty plan shall include professional development components for all instructional staff, counselors, and media specialists and may include reciprocity features that facilitate movement from one college to another.

(5) Procedures for accurate record keeping and documentation for plan monitoring. It is recommended that the plan identify the college officials or administrators responsible for the administration, record keeping and ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the plan. It is recommended the plan monitoring, evidence collected, and records maintained showing implementation of the plan be comprehensive in scope. It is recommended that the plan provide for the documentation that each faculty member appropriately possesses, attains or progresses toward attaining minimum competencies.

(6) Consortium arrangements where appropriate, cost-effective and mutually beneficial. It is recommended that the plan provide an outline of existing and potential consortium arrangements including a description of the benefits, cost-effectiveness, and method of evaluating consortium services.

(7) Specific activities that ensure that faculty attain and demonstrate instructional competencies and knowledge in their subject or technical areas. It is recommended that the plan identify faculty minimum competencies and explain the method or methods of determining and assessing competencies. It is recommended that the plan contain procedures for reporting faculty progress. It is recommended that faculty be notified at least once a year of their progress in attaining competencies.

(8) Procedures for collection and maintenance of records demonstrating that each faculty member has attained or documented progress toward attaining minimum competencies. It is recommended that the plan specify data collection procedures that demonstrate how each full-time faculty member has attained or has documented progress toward attaining minimum competencies. It is recommended that the plan incorporate the current department of education management information system

data submission requirements by which each college submits complete human resources data files electronically as a part of the college's year-end reporting.

(9) Compliance with the faculty accreditation standards of similar accredited institutions of higher education that are consistent with the standards established pursuant to Iowa Code section 260C.48 and with faculty standards required under specific programs offered by the community college that are accredited by other accrediting agencies. For purposes of this subparagraph, "accredited" means that an institution of higher education meets the standards established by an accrediting agency recognized under 34 CFR Part 602 and by Title IV of the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 110-315.

c. The department of education shall notify the community college when the department requires that a modified quality faculty plan be submitted. The department shall review the plan during the state accreditation evaluations to ensure each community college's compliance and progress in implementing a quality faculty plan as approved by the local board of directors. The department shall review the following:

(1) Documents submitted by the college that demonstrate that the plan includes each component required by paragraph "b" of this subrule.

(2) Documentation submitted by the college that the board of directors approved the plan.

(3) Documentation submitted by the college that the college is implementing the approved plan, including, but not limited to, evidence of plan monitoring, evaluation and updating; evidence that the faculty has attained, or is progressing toward attaining, minimum competencies and standards contained in Iowa Code section 260C.48; evidence that faculty members have been notified of their progress toward attaining minimum competencies and standards; and evidence that the college meets the minimum accreditation requirements for faculty required by the Higher Learning Commission.

(4) Documentation that the college administration encourages the continued development of faculty potential as defined in Iowa Code Supplement section 260C.36 as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, House File 2679.

(5) Documentation of the human resources report submitted by the college through the department's community college management information system.

**24.5(8) Senior year plus.** The community college shall provide access to joint enrollment opportunities for high school age students. Each college shall comply with the appropriate standards defined in Iowa Code chapter 261E.

[ARC 8644B, IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10; ARC 0015C, IAB 2/22/12, effective 3/28/12; ARC 2945C, IAB 2/15/17, effective 3/22/17; ARC 5327C, IAB 12/16/20, effective 1/20/21; ARC 6926C, IAB 3/8/23, effective 4/12/23]

## **281—24.6(260C) Accreditation process.**

**24.6(1) Components.** The community college accreditation process shall include the following components:

a. Each community college shall submit information on an annual basis to the department of education to comply with program evaluation requirements adopted by the state board of education.

b. The department of education shall conduct a comprehensive on-site accreditation evaluation of each community college on a ten-year interval. An interim evaluation midway between comprehensive evaluations shall also be conducted. The department shall prepare a staggered evaluation schedule which sets no more than three comprehensive or interim evaluations in any one year. No comprehensive or interim evaluation shall be required for continued accreditation prior to a community college's first evaluation under the schedule. The department shall have the authority to conduct focus evaluation visits as needed.

**24.6(2) Accreditation team.** The size and composition of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director of the department, but the team shall include members of the department of education staff and staff members from community colleges other than the community college being evaluated for accreditation, and any other technical experts as needed.

**24.6(3) Accreditation team action.** After a visit to a community college, the accreditation team shall evaluate whether the accreditation standards have been met and shall make a report to the director

of the department and the state board of education, together with a recommendation as to whether the community college shall remain accredited. The accreditation team shall report strengths and opportunities for improvement, if any, for each standard and criterion and shall advise the community college of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance strengths and address areas for improvement. A community college may respond to the accreditation team's report.

**24.6(4) State board of education consideration of accreditation.** The state board of education shall determine whether a community college shall remain accredited. Approval of accreditation for a community college by the state board of education shall be based upon the recommendation of the director of the department after study of the factual and evaluative evidence on record pursuant to the standards and criteria described in this chapter, and based upon the timely submission of information required by the department of education in a format provided by the department of education. With the approval of the director of the department, a focus visit may be conducted if the situation at a particular college warrants such a visit.

*a. Accreditation granted.* Continuation of accreditation, if granted, shall be for a ten-year term; however, approval for a lesser term may be granted by the state board of education if the board determines that conditions so warrant.

*b. Accreditation denied or conditional accreditation.* If the state board of education denies accreditation or grants conditional accreditation, the director of the department of education, in cooperation with the board of directors of the community college, shall establish a plan prescribing the procedures that must be taken to correct deficiencies in meeting the standards and criteria and shall establish a deadline for correction of the deficiencies. The plan shall be submitted to the director within 45 days following the notice of accreditation denial or conditional accreditation. The plan shall include components which address correcting deficiencies, sharing or merger options, discontinuance of specific programs or courses of study, and any other options proposed by the state board of education or the accreditation team to allow the college to meet the accreditation standards and criteria.

*c. Implementation of plan.* During the time specified in the plan for its implementation, the community college remains accredited. The accreditation team shall revisit the community college to evaluate whether the deficiencies in the standards or criteria have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board of education. The state board of education shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies have been corrected.

*d. Removal of accreditation.* The director shall give a community college which fails to meet accreditation standards, as determined by the state board of education, at least one year's notice prior to removal of accreditation. The notice shall be sent by certified mail or restricted certified mail addressed to the chief executive officer of the community college and shall specify the reasons for removal of accreditation. The notice shall also be sent to each member of the board of directors of the community college. If, during the year, the community college remedies the reasons for removal of accreditation and satisfies the director that the community college will comply with the accreditation standards and criteria in the future, the director shall continue the accreditation and shall transmit notice of the action to the community college by certified mail or restricted certified mail.

*e. Failure to correct deficiencies.* If the deficiencies have not been corrected in a program of a community college, the community college board of directors shall take one of the following actions within 60 days from removal of accreditation:

(1) Merge the deficient program or programs with a program or programs from another accredited community college.

(2) Contract with another accredited postsecondary educational institution for purposes of program delivery at the community college.

(3) Discontinue the program or programs which have been identified as deficient.

*f. Appeal process provided.* The action of the director to remove the state accreditation of a community college program may be appealed to the state board of education as provided in Iowa Code section 260C.47, subsection 7.

[ARC 8644B, IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10; ARC 0015C, IAB 2/22/12, effective 3/28/12]

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code section 258.4(7) and chapters 260C and 261E.

[Filed 7/27/06, Notice 6/7/06—published 8/16/06, effective 9/20/06]

[Filed 11/20/08, Notice 8/27/08—published 12/17/08, effective 1/21/09]

[Filed ARC 8644B (Notice ARC 8388B, IAB 12/16/09), IAB 4/7/10, effective 5/12/10]

[Filed ARC 0015C (Notice ARC 9907B, IAB 12/14/11), IAB 2/22/12, effective 3/28/12]

[Filed ARC 2945C (Notice ARC 2853C, IAB 12/7/16), IAB 2/15/17, effective 3/22/17]

[Filed ARC 5327C (Notice ARC 5209C, IAB 10/7/20), IAB 12/16/20, effective 1/20/21]

[Filed ARC 6926C (Notice ARC 6756C, IAB 12/14/22), IAB 3/8/23, effective 4/12/23]