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DEPARTAMENTO DE EDUCACIÓN
Agencia Estatal Aprobadora

PUERTO RICO STATE APPROVAL AGENCY (PRSAA)
OPERATIONAL MANUAL

AUGUST 2017

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Introduction

In this document the breakdown of the standards, criteria, indicators and procedures of the State Approving Agency (SAA). They must be met and evidenced by any educational institution applying for accreditation of postsecondary programs of occupational and technical education and non-university post-secondary programs. The SAA is a legally authorized body to facilitate the process of evaluating the programs of public institutions of postsecondary occupational and technical education and vocational schools attached to the Department of Education. Through its substantive creation, was assigned the responsibility described above and was granted the legal authority to operate as an independent entity attached to the Office of the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico.

The SAA arises as a result of the 1980 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 in which was eliminated the automatic eligibility that public institutions of postsecondary occupational and technical education had to participate in federal programs of economic assistance to the student.

By virtue of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and the Code of Federal Regulations 34CFR600, any public post-secondary institution of occupational and technical education can participate in these programs, if it meet the following requirements:

1. That fits to the definition of what is a post-secondary occupational and technical institution, in accordance with Public Law 96-374 of 1980.
2. The institution and its programs are accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Secretary of Education of the United States as a bona fide authority of the occupational public education and technical education.

To such effects, the Puerto Rico Department of Education issued circular letter No. 4-82-83 by creating the SAA, attached to the Office of the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico.

Definitions

1. Advisory Commission- group of professionals whose responsibility it is to review and analyze the rules, processes, standards and public policy related to the SAA.

2. Board of Examiners- group of professionals who will recommend to the SAA accreditation review, denial, revocation or suspension of the accreditation of an institution or program. In addition, it recommends the crediting period.
3. Evaluation Committee - a group of volunteers, free from bias, highly trained in the areas of academic, occupational and technological, selected by the SAA, and that they are able to judge in a professionally responsible manner the effectiveness in terms of expected results and the objectives set out and delineated.
4. AEA - Spanish acronym that means State Approving Agency. Government organization that reviews approves and authorizes the public post-secondary institutions of technical and occupational education.
5. Manual operation of the AEA- The main guide of the SAA that contains all guides and the framework of the processes.
6. Accreditation Standards are the criteria and indicators to be met and highlight all the educational institution applying for accreditation of programs of public technology institutions of post-secondary level and vocational schools.
7. Institutes - University that offers associate degree and certificate in technical areas, health and occupational and business administration.
8. Vocational Schools - School offering courses for high school students and adults who wish to enter the world of work.
9. Programs - Group of courses focused on the development of knowledge and skills
10. Evaluator – a neutral professional with the ability to judge all the components of the operations of the applicant using the methodology and the models set out in the Operational Manual of the SAA.
11. Request- document issued by an entity or individual applying for accreditation of the program by the SAA.
12. Fiscal Year - The amount of time that begins July 1st and ends on 30 June in each calendar year.
13. Ethical Standards - The set of standards published by the SAA so that the Board of Examiners and the group of evaluators implement and follow them. Also, all institutions requesting accreditation,

14. Occupational School- School organized to provide occupational training in different specialized fields to secondary school students and to those adult persons of one sex or the other, interested in joining the job market.
15. Referendum- document that uses the Board of Examiners to issue the crediting period recommended for an institution or program or a denial of accreditation to a program.

Chapter 1: State Approving Agency (SAA)

Article 1.1: About the PRSAA

The PRSAA is an organization authorized by law to facilitate the process of evaluation of the technological institutes, public post-secondary education and occupational education programs in Puerto Rico that are part of the Puerto Rico Department of Education.

The office was created in response to the amendments to the Law on Higher Education (*Higher Education Act (HEA)* of 1965 of the United States Department of Education (USDE), on the elimination of automatic eligibility granted to programs of occupational and technical education of the public education system; and on the requirement of having an approval process in order to participate in programs and federal financial aid available to students.

Under the Federal Law on Higher Education of 1965, as amended, and Section 600 of Volume 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), all public institutions of postsecondary occupational and technical education may participate, if they meet the following requirements:

1. The meaning of occupational post-secondary institution must be aligned with the established by Law 96374 of 1980.
2. The institution and its programs must be accredited by a state agency recognized as a *bona fide authority* in the post-secondary occupational education by the Secretary of Education of the United States.

As a result, the Puerto Rico Department of Education issued Circular Letter No. 4-1982-1983; the Secretary of Education of the United States recognized and endorsed the PRSAA as a *bona fide authority* to approve and measure the quality of the programs and

procedures of public institutions for occupational and technical education of Puerto Rico.

Article 1.2: Goals of the SAA

Establish accreditation standards for the development, instruction, the results, procedures and services of post-secondary programs and certificates to ensure the quality of education.

1. Evaluate the offers academic and administrative functions of postsecondary institutions and certificate in relation to the accreditation standards set by the SAA.
2. Evaluates the offers of academic and administrative functions in postsecondary programs and certificates established by the SAA.
3. Guarantee ethics and accountability in the process of accreditation by means of best practices and guidelines.

Article 1.3: Objectives of the SAA

1. Review the requests of institutions or programs applying for accreditation.
2. Determine the eligibility of the institution or the post-secondary program requesting accreditation in accordance with the definition established by Section 602.2, volume 34 of the CFR.
3. Manage the documents related to the self-assessment to be carried out, as well as the regulations, criteria and procedures.
4. Advise the institutions or programs that apply for accreditation on technical and academic affairs according to the established laws.
5. Choose the members of the Evaluation Committee and keeps documents related to their professional skills.
6. Organize a calendar of trainings for the Evaluation Committee and the two boards on the accreditation process.
7. To assess the quality of programs and institutions to determine the scope of the benefits of the economic aid program.
8. Coordinate with the Advisory Commission for revision of the instruments and accreditation of institutions and programs
9. Produces reports for the institutions during the process of evaluation and work with the information related to the accreditation process, complaints and appeals.

10. Preserve and protect reports and all documents related to the accreditation process for a maximum of 5 years in active files belonging to the Office of the SAA.
11. Report any revision of criteria, regulations, and policies that can issue the SAA.
12. Divulge information to the Puerto Rican community on all programs and accredited institutions.
13. Guide to the groups or committees of education interested in the services, operation and the capacity of the SAA.
14. To follow up on the implementation of the recommendations offered to the programs and institutions evaluated.
15. Recommend the accreditation, denial, reconsideration, revocation or suspension of the accreditation of an institution or program.

Article 1.4: Operational Functions

The AEA for Postsecondary Institutions and Programs of Occupational and Technical Education (SAA) established the following operational rules:

1. The SAA will promote the interests of the directors of technological institutions and occupational schools to obtain and preserve the eligibility to participate in the federal financial aid is available to students enrolled in programs at the post-secondary level in public technology institutions of Puerto Rico.

2. By means of follow-up visits, the SAA will motivate the public post-secondary institutions of technical and occupational education of Puerto Rico to establish a process of continuous self-assessment, with a focus on promoting and improving the quality of education services and to generate among the faculty an action aimed at the improvement.

3. The SAA will report the findings and recommendations to the Board of Examiners for the accreditation of programs and institutions whose quality of educational services to comply with the regulations and requirements of the criteria and standards in the area of administrative performance, general education and programs.

4. For the purposes of accreditation, the SAA should serve as a liaison between the Technical Education Program, the Evaluation Committee and the occupational and technical institutes at the post-secondary level in Puerto Rico.

5. The SAA will keep informed the Institutions on the requirements necessary to upgrade and maintain the accreditation.

6. The SAA accredited institutions will require a written request for the extension of its status of approval. The application must be submitted six (6) months prior to the expiration date.

7. The AEA will require a semi-annual report and annual compliance in updating the progress of implementation of recommendations for correction of findings in previous assessments. This report will reflect any substantial change that includes, but is not limited to:

a. A change in the mission, vision or goals of the institution.
b. A change in the legal capacity or in the administrative compliance of the institution.
c. Additional courses or programs that represent a significant change of content or strategies or teaching methodologies.
d. Changes in the number of credit hours required to complete a course or program.
e. Any administrative situation that affects the proper functioning of the institution including and not limited to recruitment of both teaching and non-teaching personnel and the director of the institution; alteration to the start date or completion of the academic semester; payment of grants; allocation of budget; physical plant emergencies.

8. The SAA carry out investigations in fact corroborative to obtain evidence in the event of any institution to exercise practices or procedures against the rules established or taken any significant change without prior notification to the SAA.

9. According to the findings of the research, the SAA shall notify the director of the institution in which are identified irregularities and granted a period of sixty (60) days if the institution demonstrates the efforts that would be carried out in order to eliminate such irregularities.

10. The SAA shall render a report with recommendations to the Board of Examiners after the 60 days period, given as the maximum period to correct the irregularities. The SAA shall render a report of the final decision to the institution.

11. The SAA shall inform the decision of the Board of Examiners by writing to the appropriate state and federal agencies.

12. The SAA will visit the accredited institutions, once in the first semester after accreditation with prior notification, to confirm that fostered with the recommendations of the Committee on evaluation, according to the Higher Education Act and the Code of Federal Regulations (Section 602.11, took 34). In addition, follow-up visits without prior notice.

13. The SAA will issue an annual report containing a summary of all activities related to the accreditation process and overall performance, which will be circulated among all interested parties.

14. The SAA will be in charge of the following activities prior to the evaluation committee:

15. Organize and conduct training meetings for the members of the committee, with the purpose of:

a. To become familiar with the evaluation process.
b. Train them on the peculiarities of the institution.
c. To become familiar with the standards and criteria that will be evaluated.

16. Provide copies of the following documents:

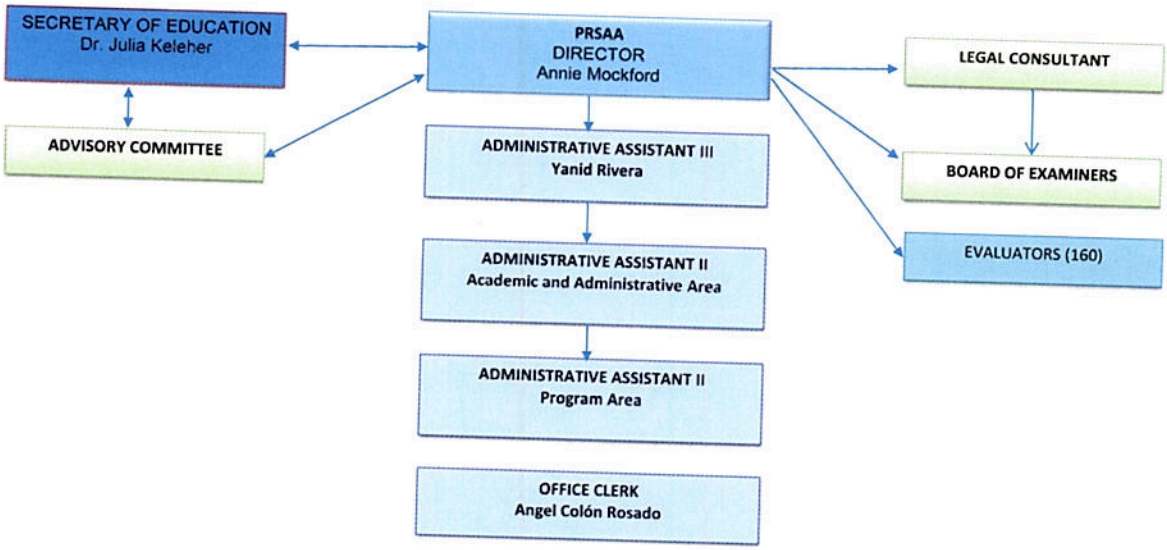
a. Copy of the Operational Manual of the SAA
b. Copies of the guide for the evaluation of the public occupational education and Technical Education in Puerto Rico.
c. Copies of the documents of self-evaluation submitted by the institution.

17. The SAA will meet with interested institutions in the accreditation and give guidance to the members of the Steering Committee on accreditation processes established by law.

18. The SAA will held regular meetings with the members of the Advisory Commission to review, analyze, or create instruments related to the accreditation process.

Article 1.5: SAA organizational chart

PRSAA ORGANIZATION CHART
2017-2019



Article 1.6: Qualifications of the SAA Personnel

Section 1.6.1: Executive Director

1. Master or Doctoral degree in Higher education with 3.50 average or higher.
2. Full time work experience as professor or director of a postsecondary institution for 3 or more years.
3. Work experience as vocational high school director for a minimum of 5 years.
4. Work as or participated as evaluator of postsecondary institutions as employee or by contract with the PR Educational Council; PR Council for Higher Education; PR General Education Council; Middle State Association or another accrediting agency recognized by the USDE
5. Haven't been employee, professor or director for the last 3 years in any of the postsecondary institutions accredited by the SAA.
6. Haven't been director of the Technical Education Program for the last 5 years.
7. Read, write, speak and interpret correctly in English and Spanish.
8. Availability to travel outside the metropolitan area, Washington, DC and work flexible schedules.

Section 1.6.2: Administrative Assistant

1. Master or doctoral degree with 3.00 average or higher.
2. Full time work experience as professor of a postsecondary institution for 5 or more years.
3. Work as or participated as evaluator of postsecondary institutions as employee or by contract with the PR Educational Council; PR Council for Higher Education; PR General Education Council; Middle State Association or other accrediting institution recognized by the USDE.
4. Have been member of the Steering Committee (Accreditation Committee) of the postsecondary institution where it works or have worked.
5. Haven't been employee, director or professor in any of the institution accredited by the SAA in the last 3 years.
6. Haven't been director of the Technical Education Program for the last 5 years.
7. Read, write, speak and interpret correctly in English and Spanish.
8. Knowledge in the use of word, excel, publisher, power point, etc.
9. Availability to travel outside the metropolitan area, Washington, DC and work flexible schedules.

Chapter 2: Standards of Accreditation

Article 2.1: Accreditation Process

Section 2.1.1: 1st. Stage

The process begins with the application for accreditation. The director of the institution that is interested in participating in the accreditation process names and organizes the Steering Committee. This committee shall be composed of members of the administration, the staff that provides services to the student, the faculty of post-secondary programs to be evaluated and a student. The Steering Committee directs the work of self-evaluation.

In this process, the Administrative Assistant of the SAA offers technical assistance to the members of the Steering Committee to carry out the activities of self-evaluation of the different areas.

Section 2.1.2: 2nd Stage

The Steering Committee prepares the self-evaluation of the institution, of the programs and completes the guide for the evaluation. Then will submit the self-evaluation to the SAA with all the evidence requested.

Section 2.1.3: 3rd. Stage

Consists of the on-site evaluation visit of the institution. The SAA organizes an evaluation committee composed of experts in the area to be evaluated. The Evaluation Committee will visit the institution with the purpose of verifying if the self-evaluation reflects the institutional reality. The committee goes in search of facts and data to verify the one submitted in the self-evaluation. After the on-site visit, the Evaluation Committee shall deliver its visit report to the SAA with a narrative assessment - quantitative and qualitative information on the outcome of the on-site visit.

When the institution receives the notification of accreditation of its programs, it accepts the obligation to demonstrate compliance with the accreditation standards. The SAA will use a variety of assessment methods to verify if the institution meets the standards, such as: on-site visit by the evaluation committee, review of the self-study and other documents. The institution will provide to the SAA the complete documents in compliance with accreditation standards.

Article 2.2: Application for Accreditation

Every institution shall file the application for accreditation or re-accreditation on a voluntary basis. The institution will be requested, using the official form of the SAA in which shall specify the programs seeking accreditation or re-accreditation.

The request for accreditation will be submitted with a minimum of six (6) months prior to the expiration date of the current accreditation or accreditation of a new program.

Article 2.3: Self-study

The self-study should be a comprehensive analysis of the resources of each institution, in other words, the same is an x-ray of the institution in which reflected their strengths and areas for improvement, so that the same represents an opportunity to achieve their objectives by basing their practices on continuous improvement in the delivery of educational services.

The institution shall submit to the SAA the self-study, as indicated above. This must be a comprehensive analysis of the entire institution, as well as their capacity to achieve maximum quality and be aligned to best practices, with its goals and objectives, with the purpose of continuously improving the delivery of educational services.

The institution submits the self-study as mentioned above. This must be a comprehensive analysis of all of the institution and its ability to achieve the highest level of quality and that they are aligned with best practices, goals and objectives in such a way as to continuously improve the educational services.

This self-study must be drawn up by the faculty, students, as well as the administration of the institution, in order that the institutional academic community gets involve. The institution must incorporate this self-study process as a permanent part of their operations.

Article 2.4: Evaluation Committee

After the SAA receives the request and self-study of the institution, starts the preparations for the on-site visit of the evaluation committee. The evaluation committee is a body established by a group of volunteer professionals of great competence in the educational, occupational and technical areas, selected by the SAA. They carry out the on-site visit to the institution seeking accreditation of their programs. The primary purpose of this committee is to verify the accuracy of the self-evaluation report and assess the achievement of the objectives and established accreditation standards. The members of the evaluation committee will meet with the administration staff, teachers, students, and any other person that the director of the institution will invite, to receive general information about conditions, and findings of the institution. In the evaluation process any doubts arising should be channeled through the SAA and never directly or indirectly with the evaluators.

Each member of the Evaluation Committee shall render a report at the end of the visit of the area that was assigned. The report is a summary of the strengths and areas of improvement found during the visit and the recommendations made by each of the members of the Evaluation Committee to the SAA. The report will be submitted to the SAA by the leader of the Evaluation Committee up to five (5) working days after the visit.

The report may include additional findings and requests for additional information to the institution.

The SAA will have fifteen (15) working days for the review and submit the report to the institution.

The institution will receive, after delivery of the report by the evaluation committee, the report of findings and recommendations and will be provided the opportunity to react and submit additional information within fifteen (15) working days as stipulated by the SAA.

The SAA receives the report of reaction and the Plan of Action from the institution for its review. Once revised, is submitted to the Board of Examiners for the final determination.

Article 2.5: Reports

The AEA organizes and submits to the Board of Examiners, the report of the Evaluation Committee for the final determination of the accrediting period.

The report of the on-site visit of the Evaluation Committee and the reaction report of the institution are confidential and cannot be shared with any third party. Any questions during the evaluation process on the on-site visit must be channeled through the SAA and never with the evaluator directly.

Section 2.5.1: Actions you can determine

The SAA is empowered, through Examining Board and the Advisory Commission, in order to, among other things:

a. Award accreditation.
b. Deny accreditation when the institution, does not meet the criteria of evaluation.
c. To defer the decision of accreditation.
d. Return the documents under consideration when additional information is required or is incomplete.
e. Notify the institution of the extension of the evaluation period
f. Revoke the accreditation

Article 2.6: Appeal

The institution may appeal the final decision of the Board of Examiners with regard to the non-accreditation to the Advisory Commission in its role of appeal. The appeal shall be according to the following procedures:

1. The institution or program that receives the final written determination of refusal, revocation or pending approval status, can submit a request in writing within ten (10) working days after notification to initiate an appeal process. The expiration date is calculated using the date of issuance of the notification in the notification sheet, the post mark or e-mail, of the first notification was issued. In this communication, the institution shall indicate the specific reasons for requesting an appeal.

2. The appeal must be addressed by the Board of Examiners within thirty (30) working days of receipt of the appeal letter of the Institution.

a. The Institution may request reconsideration in writing and addressed to the Board of Examiners of the SAA. The institution will have the opportunity to offer relevant evidence, relevant and justifiable for the evaluation or the reconsideration of the status.

b. The Board of Examiners has thirty (30) working days after receiving the request to analyze and respond to the director of the institution. In addition, can visit or call the institution to verify or review any situation that has been addressed during the reconsideration process.

c. If the director of the institution is still in disagreement with the decision of the Board of Examiners after the second stage, he or she may apply for a third and final review. For this step, the director of the institution shall have ten (10) working days after receiving the response from the Board of Examiners. On this occasion, the request for review shall be sent directly to the Advisory Committee.

d. The Advisory Commission has twenty (20) working days after receipt of the request, to analyze and respond to the letter of application and evidence submitted by the director of the institution. As part of this process, the role of the Advisory Commission will be to act as an official examiner and could visit or call the institution in order to verify the conditions that have been considered during the reconsideration process. All visits and phone calls have to be made prior to the submission of the final report of recommendations.

e. The final determination made by the Advisory Commission should be supported by the findings of the on-site visit report of the members of the Advisory Commission, the fulfillment of the Action Plan. Based on these conclusions, the

SAA will provide a written report of the final decision, which will be one of the following:

i. to maintain the original determination
ii. modify the original determination
iii. revoke the original determination. A copy of the final determination will be sent to the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Education of the Government of Puerto Rico. The minutes of each meeting during the process will be prepared and submitted to the office of the SAA. This step puts an end to the administrative processes and any resolution at this point shall be final.

3. During the process of appeal of a determination by the Board of Examiners of the SAA the institution will maintain the accreditation for the duration of the process.

Article 2.7: Reports Semi-Annuals

The semi-annual reports of the institution are required and reviewed for the process of accreditation of programs. The programs offered by the institution must comply with the accreditation standards set by the SAA. In addition, must comply with the competencies required by the occupation of each program offered to students of each institution.

This report must be submitted to the SAA twice a year: the last Friday of January and the third Friday of June. This report will be reviewed by the Advisory Commission to determine whether it complies with the provisions in the Operational Manual of the SAA. Article 2.8: Evaluation Criteria

Section 2.8.1: Purpose

This section establishes the eligibility criteria, by which the institution must be subject to the request, obtain and maintain accreditation of their programs. The institution must be in full compliance with the same before applying for accreditation or re-accreditation, for the consideration of the request.

Section 2.8.2: Scope of the SAA

According to the powers conferred to the SAA by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended in 1980, is considered only public institutions of postsecondary or occupational and technical education attached to the Department of Education of Puerto Rico to be accredited as required by the Higher Education Act (HEA) as amended.

Section 2.8.3: Eligibility Requirements

1. Application for initial accreditation to the SAA. In this application, the institution must demonstrate that it meets the following eligibility criteria:
    a. The institution must comply with the eligibility criteria according to the standards of accreditation.
    b. The application must be complete so that it complies with all the requirements.
2. Application for renewal of the accreditation. The institution shall submit its application for renewal in compliance with the stipulated time. The same must be complete and show sufficient stability to receive approval.
3. Maintain accreditation. To maintain accreditation, the institution must comply with the accreditation standards and requirements of the SAA. This means that the institution must remain in continuous operation, training students according to the primary objectives, for which it was authorized.

Section 2.8.4: Educational Objectives

1. To prepare the student to enter the world of work with the domain, the competencies and skills required.
2. The institution ensures that all courses are available with the teachers appointed to enable the student to complete your program of study at the stipulated time.
3. The institution may have other educational objectives to strengthen teaching and learning processes such as:
    a. Additional review training or mentoring program
    b. Continuing Education
    c. Others
4. The institution may enter into agreements with the trade, industry and government agencies for purposes of training in group and the development of centers of practice where the student learn by doing.

Section 2.8.5: Program Requirements

The purpose of this section identifies several elements that will help the institution to achieve its objectives so that they can maintain its accreditation. These elements include

the duration of the program, draft of the courses, handbooks, learning objectives, instructional materials and equipment, the availability and access to the materials, learning resources and processes to prepare the student to obtain and maintain employment.

1. General Requirements

The following requirements apply to all programs of study

a. Duration of the program
    i. Number of credits
    ii. Credit Hours
    iii. Clock Hours
b. Curriculum sequence by programs
c. Organization of program
d. For each program of study must have a detailed outline and the syllabuses of the courses.
e. Equipment, tools and materials of instruction
f. Thematic Framework

The request shall include a form to present the list of teachers, administrative and non-teaching staff. In this table, the institution introduces and describes the essential demographic information of each staff member. In the case of the teaching staff will, in addition, the copy of the teacher certification; or temporary certificate of teacher; regular teacher's certificate in the area that teaches.

2. Curricular sequence of each program

The sequence of courses by program and the operation of the same must contain the following criteria:

a. The curriculum for each program and the policy of credit hours
b. General Education courses
c. Core courses
d. Courses of concentration
e. Free elective courses
f. The sequence of courses should be planned to provide the same, starting from the basics to the more advanced

g. Establish requirements and pre-requisites when needed

h. Planning and organization of the program and the policy of credit hours

i. Syllabary

ii. Equipment, tools and materials

iii. Security for the equipment and materials

iv. The teaching-learning process, ethical standards and the policy of credit hours.

3. The Advisory Committee of each program

Each institution to be evaluated for accreditation must have an advisory committee for each program. The members of this committee must be professionals representing the occupation or occupations offered by the institution. There must be carried out at least two (2) meetings per year. The institution must properly maintain archived the minutes of the meetings of the Advisory Committee of each program. In this advisory committee can't participate other teachers or employees of the institution.

a. The duties of the Advisory Committee of the program are the following:

i. Review, at least every two years the curriculum of the programs and make recommendations concerning the objectives, curriculum content, duration of the program and if the facilities and equipment are adequate.

ii. Review and analyze if students complete their courses on time, on the demand for employment in the area of study and if the graduates need a license to practice their profession.

4. The Practice Center.

The internship of the student must be supervised and coordinated by the professor in charge of the same. The internship should be based on a written plan that specifies the goals and objectives and experience that the student must achieve.

a. The institution must maintain a balance between the technical classes, laboratories, and the practice in the industry, commerce, and government agencies.

b. The minimum period shall be as established in the syllabary of the associate degree, certificate, or occupational program.

5. Associate Degree

a. The associate degree will have a minimum duration of 4-5 semesters and 65-75 credits. The associate degree shall include a minimum of 9 courses in general education and related courses.

b. In the advertising and promotion of the institution needs to clearly state that this is an associate's degree for occupational and academic associate's degree.

6. Occupational Certificate

a. Occupational program not leading to an associate degree, bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, that comply with the demand for work in Puerto Rico and with what is established in the Department of State of the Government of Puerto Rico (if applicable).

7. Occupational Programs

a. Occupational programs should contain the following requirements:

i. elements of the post-secondary level at the secondary level (articulation with universities)

ii. academic and occupational content aligned,

iii. sequential courses endorsed by the industry

iv. an occupational certificate and a technical certificate at the post-secondary level of the associate degree or baccalaureate

v. occupations must be of high demand and complex skills.

8. Faculty

The achievement of an educational institution rests primarily on the quality of its faculty. The purpose of this section is to require the institution to count and retain faculty with academic preparation and the required experience. The institution must ensure that its faculty is appropriate and sufficient in number to the instructional programs it offers. To recruit and retain qualified teachers, the institution will be able to offer a quality education in their programs.

a. The following requirements apply for all programs offered by the institution

i. When it is required by law, teachers must be certified and have a teaching license issued by the Teacher Certification Unit of the Department of Education, and keep up to date the license that requires their profession, if applicable.
ii. The specialized personnel should be proportional to the courses offered in the semester.
iii. All the teaching staff must maintain a good working relationship with students, their colleagues, the administration and non-teaching staff.
iv. The institution must have a comprehensive strategic plan and that it must be in writing and that includes the improvement of the faculty and budget allocation for that process.
v. The director of the institution must have the experience, knowledge and academic preparation required to lead the institution. In addition, the director of the institution must have the license of Director of Technological Institutes issued by the Teacher Certification Unit of the Department of Education.

9. Recruitment of Students

The purpose of this section is to require the institution to guide properly the student who wishes to enroll, so that it can decide free of pressure from part of the personnel in charge of recruitment. The primary effort of the institution must be the attract students who meet the admission requirements and that they can benefit from the offer of the program of study.

a. The institution shall observe the ethical practices and procedures required for the recruitment of students. The practices and procedures include, as a minimum:
    i. The institution will use designated employees as recruiters for outreach and recruitment of students. To achieve an effective guide, the person who offers the information must have basic knowledge of each program or technology. It is highly recommended that teachers of the programs will involve in this process.

ii. The institution responds to the laws, state and federal regulations for the non-compliance of substantive provisions and legal ethical violations as it relates to the process of recruitment of students.

iii. The institution shall ensure that its recruiters will offer truthful information of the institution, the staff, and the study programs or of its accreditation status.

iv. The recruiter will not be able to make promise of job to the
   i. Student who is being recruited.

v. The institution will only allow payment in money order or manager checks issued to The Secretary of Treasury as payment for the admission application and will provide a receipt of payment for the money charged to the student at the time of submitting the admission papers.

vi. The institution will not allow the recruiter to become involved in
   i. The admission tests or in the final decision of student admission.

vii. The institution will establish a policy of cancellation of student registration.

viii. The institution will give the student a copy of the agreements
   i. Of the enrollment process.

ix. The staff of the institution should not influence any student or
   i. Coerce to leave another institution after tuition agreements were signed with the other institution.

10. Institution Catalogue

The catalog of the institution must have the following:

a. The catalog must accurately represent the educational programs that offer, the resources and facilities, procedures and institutional policies.

b. The catalog must be designed and written in a clear and orderly that highlight the institution. The illustrations, photographs, and the narrative part should be relevant to the institution and other illustrations and photographs should be clearly identified.

c. The institution will provide each prospective student the catalog before it signs the enrolment agreement.
d. The catalog must include the sequential of each program and the courses description.
e. The title of the program; the name of the associate degree and credentials awarded; the description of the program and courses must be included in the catalog of the institution.

11. Standards of recruitment and admission policy

These standards should be indicated in the catalog of the institution. Every candidate must meet the following requirements:

a. Universal admission test or the *College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB)*
b. Students are to be classified in the following way:
    i. Regular students
    ii. Special education students
    iii. Students with conditional admission
    iv. Foreign Students
    v. Transfer Students
    vi. Students who possess a post-secondary degree or certification

12. Enrolment Agreement with the Student

The Enrolment Agreement must include the following criteria:

a. That the applicant meets all the requirements for registration.
b. To clearly establish the obligation on the part of the applicant and that of the institution with regard to everything related to the requirements of the registration
c. The institution shall ensure that each applicant is duly informed of their rights, responsibilities and obligations to the institution or schools and have been advised toward the right to file claims and complaints in the SAA.
d. The agreement of enrolment will not be valid until the applicant is accepted by an authorized officer of the institution and the program.

e. The Enrolment Agreement must be delivered to the applicant at the time it accept and sign the entry to the program which was accepted.

13. Advertising and Promotion

All advertising and promotion of the institution must be:

a. Clear, true and accurate and free from false and exaggerated expressions or information of the institution, location, name, its staff, the administration and the services they offer.

b. The publicity and promotion must clearly indicate that education is essential for the student and is not an offer of employment.

c. The use of the term accredited institution may be used if the AEA indicates that grants it.

d. The institution may include in the catalog, advertise or promote new programs after being authorized by the Puerto Rico Educational Council and accredited by the SAA.

e. You must include the policy of non-discrimination and the source of payment of the advertisement.

14. Admission Policy

The purpose of this section is to ensure that the institution will admit students who meet the requirements and that successfully complete the training they offer. The decision of the admission will be based on equitable terms.

a. The institution shall ensure that each applicant is duly informed of the nature of the training provided.

b. The institution implemented consistently admissions standards.

c. The applicant shall indicate if you require accommodation by the ADA (American Disability Act)

d. The institution shall not deny admission on the argument of race, color, political or religious, sex, age, physical or mental impairments, national or social origin, sexual orientation or veteran status of the applicant. The institution shall make reasonable accommodations required under applicable federal and state laws, if the student notifies it during the registration process.

e. The AEA may require the institution to demonstrate the processes and admissions policy.

15. Institutional Policy of Tuition

a. The institution shall establish a policy with respect to the charges for tuition, fees, and other services to the student. The collector officer will use the circular letter of rules and procedures for the collection of tuition and services on the institutions.

b. The costs of tuition, fees and other payments should be reported to the candidates during orientation periods and processes of enrolment

c. The institution will provide the AEA changes of tuition costs and duration of the courses for each accredited program, to the extent that arise.

d. The institution must establish the refund policy in compliance with the established requirements. The refund policy the student must comply with the following elements:

i. How to calculate the refund

ii. The date on which the reimbursement should be calculated

iii. At the time, this must be calculated

e. The refund policy should be included in the catalog and in the enrolment agreement with the student. It must comply with the refund according to the institutional policy and described in the catalog

16. Student Support Services

The purpose of this section is to ensure that the institution remains attentive to the effective education and other needs of the student. It is required that the institution meets the minimum requirements related to economic aid, maintenance of records, employment and procedures on how to handle complaints and grievances of the students. The institution must provide adequate support to the student and have the necessary resources for the assistance that they require, to maintain satisfactory academic progress in their programs of study.

a. Advice and Counseling

The institution must maintain an advisory service and counseling service for all its students. This service must be coordinated by the personnel with suitable qualifications in the area of counseling and guidance. The staff that provides counseling services must have the required license, appropriate training or work experience in the areas of counseling and guidance to post-secondary level. The institution shall maintain a confidential record of the students who are offered counseling with dates and the place where the service was offered.

b. Files

Student records are maintained in a file for the time requires for these types of documents.

The personal and financial documents from the student must be kept in a safe place, in a file fire and vandalism proof.

The institution shall maintain in its file documents of the initial employment of graduates and other important documents.

c. Transcript of Credits

Official transcripts will be given to the student when the student graduates, if they will not have debts with the institution. The transcript of credits includes: attendance report, program of study, approved credit, credit hours, and the grades obtained.

Requests for additional transcripts will be delivered in accordance to the policies and procedures of the institution.

The Office of the Registrar is responsible for the registration process, the file and of the custody of the records.

The delivery of transcripts will be carried out in accordance with the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) of 1974, as amended.

d. Claims and Complaints

The institution shall establish a public policy and procedures for dealing with complaints and grievances of the students.

The institution will advise in writing to the student the public policy and procedures to address the grievances and complaints. The policy and grievance procedure must be published in the catalog of the institution.

The institution must keep a complete record of all written complaints by students, for a term of five (5) years from its filing.

The institution shall appoint a committee to address the grievances and complaints of the students.

Students will be oriented on the process for filing complaints and grievances in the SAA, which is the agency in charge of accrediting the educational institutions for the purpose of Title IV funds, Pell grants and loans.

e. The student's academic progress

The purpose of this section is to require the institution which must ensure that a large proportion of their students to attend class, maintain a satisfactory academic progress, complete their program of study and obtain a job in the area in which they were trained, or in related areas. The institution must establish and consistently apply the criteria that provide evaluation objectives of the academic progress of students. The institution must, in addition, maintain a written policy and procedures, emphasizing the class attendance and academic progress of the students.

f. Standards of assistance and refitting of Classes

The institution should set out clearly in the rules and procedures the class attendance policy. The attendance of students to their classes is a requirement of the institution. The institution shall publish and be responsible for establishing a policy on the attendance of students that is in accordance with the laws and regulations governing these institutions. Teachers will take the assistance of its courses and report the same to the Registrar's Office on a monthly basis. Students are responsible for attending to the refitting of classes.

g. Rules of Discipline

The institution requires to all your students observe appropriate behavior toward their classmates, teachers and administrative staff; as well as the institutional community in general. Respect for the dignity of all components of the institution is part of a healthy coexistence.

To address situations of discipline, the institution must have:

i. A discipline committee composed of one (1) professor of the specialty, one (1) academic and one (1) counselor. The Director is a ex-officio member

ii. Be governed by a regulation in line with the general rules of students of the Puerto Rico Department of Education and the institutional regulations.

h. Academic Progress

The institution is responsible for the satisfactory progress of the student, by setting minimum requirements for academic progress.

The institution shall publish in the catalog the institutional policy with regard to the satisfactory progress of the grades and attendance of the student.

The institution shall establish rules and standards of academic progress prepared by the registrar or the person in charge of that area.

The institution will implement a policy of probationary period for those students with poor academic achievement.

The institution shall determine the maximum amount of time that a student will have to complete the associate degree, certificate, or occupational program based on federal regulations.

The institution shall publish the policy that defines the negative effects that faces the student by the incomplete, rates, grade repetition and academic suspension.

17. Student Achievement

The Institution demonstrate through documents, such as: student records, transcripts of credits, record of economic assistance, semi-annual assessments of teachers by students, student achievement reporting rates, acceptable conduct and placements in the areas of study and compliance in completing the courses at the time stipulated. These rates will be supported by transcripts of the students, the verification of the records of students and other documents available. The evaluation committee will review the academic achievement of students in each program offered by the institution.

18. Administration

The purpose of this section is to ensure that the institution has the capacity and complies with the standards of management of all its components. This section emphasizes on the

requirements that the institution must comply with regard to the administration and the administrative staff, financial stability, the institutional assessment and plans for improving institutional and physical facilities. If the institution that does not meet these standards will not be able to assure the student that operates in compliance with accreditation standards.

a. Philosophy, Vision, Mission and Objectives

Any institution that wants to be evaluated for approval must have: its philosophy, vision, mission, and goals; take into consideration the occupational demands of the world of work. Shall, in addition, publish, promote and maintain updated catalog institutional knowledge of the general public.

b. Organization and planning

The institution will demonstrate a systematic process of organization and operation. Will give evidence of a systematic planning, flexible and realistic. Will display:

i. The Strategic Plan of the institution
ii. Institutional Work Plan
iii. Systemic evaluation of teaching staff
iv. Plan of Training for teaching staff
v. Create the committee for the management of ethical situations and/or discipline

c. Administrative capacity

The institution must have a budget that would allow the viability of their offers, a reliable system for management of its finances, collection system, upgrade programs, maintenance, equipment insurance, admissions policy and an officer of purchases of materials and equipment.

d. Student Evaluation and Improvement

The institution must implement the evaluation activities and institutional improvement; planning; institutional evaluation and improvement of the activities that need to be appropriate for the scope of the operations; and support for the management and administration of the institution, as well as the quality of education provided.

The appraisal and the improvement of the activities should provide for the enrichment of the quality of education offered. This is accomplished by using internal staff information,

development of the faculty, planning, input from students, external inputs from the Advisory Committee, employers, involve the community, graduates and others.

The improvement of the activities and the institutional assessment should include a comprehensive written plan and to review the operations and specifically plans to short- and long-range of three (3) years. This plan must involve the entire institution in the areas of administration, budget, administrative policies, practices and services to students, faculty and administrative staff, curriculum, learning resource centers, equipment and materials, facilities, and student achievement.

e. Financial Stability

The financial stability of the institution must be demonstrated by:

i. Adequate resources for its operations.
ii. A financial statement in accordance with the acceptable principles of accounting and audit best practices.
iii. A financial budget for each fiscal year and approved by the Institutional Council.
iv. And the fulfillment of obtaining all the required insurance.

f. Physical Structure

Any institution to be evaluated for the accreditation of their programs will have an adequate physical structure to offer educational service programs as compromised.

The physical facilities must be fit enough to create an effective and have a positive impact on the processes of teaching and learning.

All the facilities for the administration area, classrooms and Laboratories must comply with the requirements of physical security required by the fire department, environmental health, the office of management of permissions and any other regulatory entity that laws and regulations require.

Chapter 3: Rules and Procedures

Article 3.1 Evaluation Committee

Section 3.1.1 Selection of the members

The SAA has established a bank of professional candidates, among those who are public officials and employees (government), employers, postsecondary education or occupational former students, post-secondary educators, university level professors,

directors of private schools and executives, who will participate as evaluators during the on-site visit.

The Evaluation Committee shall be constituted of a group of people free from bias, conflict interest and academic links and that they are able to judge in a professionally responsible manner the effectiveness in terms of expected results and the objectives set out and delineated. An evaluator should promote constructive interaction and a defined process, clear and transparent manner between the parties.

The SAA to carefully select the members of the Evaluation Committee, in accordance with:

1. The professional preparation and experience as a professor or administrator in the technical and occupational branches to which they belong.
2. The depth of knowledge on the relevant features of a post-secondary institution in terms of organization, management and operation of occupational and technical education.

Although the SAA prefers evaluators with experience, it also recognizes the importance of incorporating team members without prior experience, with the aim of incorporating new and different perspectives.

Section 3.1.2 the qualifications for each category are described below:

Administrators - People with the preparation and experience that recent or currently are significantly involved in the administration of post-secondary Institutes or programs of a postsecondary accredited private institution.

Educators - People with the preparation and experience in academic functions within an institution of postsecondary education as, for example, a teacher, instructor or academic dean in a post-secondary private institution.

Professional in the area of specialty - people who are significantly involved in the practice of professions related to the areas assessed as, for example, a person who works part-time or full using the knowledge and skills related to the area, in the public or private sector.

It is essential that the evaluators exercise their responsibilities objectively, impartially, and consistently. The evaluators must also understand the mission, vision, goals, targets and the culture of the institution under review.

The inclusion of team members with different areas of expertise will provide a thorough evaluation of the review of compliance with the institutions with accreditation standards. These areas of expertise include, but are not limited to: corporate finance, assessment, teaching methods and online courses, administration and governance, support and coaching for the student, planning and institutional research and programs at the graduate level.

At least one of the members of the evaluation team, which will become the leader of the team, must demonstrate leadership skills, problem-solving, coaching and organizational planning. After the visit at the facility, the leader of the team will prepare a final written evaluation with the findings: these should include strengths, weaknesses and qualitative and quantitative information.

A thorough team leader will have a minimum of 6 members, including the leader of the team, in order to ensure that different points of view and adequate coverage of each of the standards and the expected results.

Since the integrity of the SAA and the quality of post-secondary public offerings may risk if there is a conflict of interest, all evaluators must be impartial and must demonstrate good will, integrity, good behavior and expertise is evidenced. The SAA will ensure that no evaluator is assigned to review any institution with which may have a conflict of interest. To ensure this, the evaluator will sign the certification report prepared by the SAA for these purposes. People should not provide any service on behalf of the SAA for any institution that has served during the preceding two (2) calendar years. This includes the participation in any discussion or decision related to the process of approval. Will not be able to maintain a contractual relationship, for advice or technical support for five (5) years, with or without financial remuneration, the Assistant Secretary of Occupational and Technical Area and in the Technical Education Program or Occupational Education Program, as it constitutes a conflict of interest and a lack of ethics.

Section 3.1.2: Training of the members

The SAA will provide compulsory training and technical assistance to all evaluators in order to raise awareness on the importance and scope of the functions that will assume. The SAA will develop a calendar of trainings throughout the year and provide to the

members of the team, logistics requirements and information about the institutions. The first training will include topics such as:

1. Review of the organizational profile of the institutions
2. How to prepare for site visit
3. How to evaluate a course or program and what are the components of the analysis (occupational, performance, domains, skills and results, among others).
4. Tips for how to be a successful evaluator
5. Tips for how to be a successful interviewer
6. Evaluation (what, how and when to evaluate)
7. Conflicts of interest and ethical standards: What do the SAA expect from the evaluators?
8. Public policy: what is the legal framework of the procedure of the evaluations in the facilities?
9. How to prepare a report of the evaluator
10. How to prepare an assertive recommendations and suggestions to the institutions
11. How to evaluate student achievement?

The evaluators also will receive a formal training on the credit hours of the Higher Education Act, as amended in 2010.

All evaluators will receive a copy of the Operational Manual in which could find the instructions, rules, regulations and procedures necessary to complete the task with success.

Section 3.1.3: The Role and Scope of the Evaluators

1. To make assessments of the facilities of the institutions applying for accreditation.
2. Develop a work plan for managing the assessment activities carried out during the visit.
3. The duration of the regular tour can last from 1 day. If additional time is required, the evaluators must submit a request for authorization to the SAA in order to comply with the goal of accreditation.
4. Prepare a report to the SAA on the results of the assessment that was performed, based on the self-assessment submitted by the institution.

Respond to the team leader, who will collect and submit a report to the director of the SAA and then the SAA to the Board of Examiners, which will make the final decision to approve or deny the accreditation.

Section 3.1.4: Responsibilities of the Evaluator to the SAA

1. Attend and participate in all training programs organized.
2. Attend and conduct meetings related to the planning of field visits.
3. To participate in the selection of the leader of the Evaluation Committee.
4. To prepare a work plan aligned with the plan of work of the Committee.
5. Study and analyze, under strict confidentiality, all documents provided by the SAA related to the institution and to the evaluation process.
6. Attend visits at the facility, as planned.
7. Make recommendations to the SAA on how to improve the evaluation process (see Appendix 5)
8. Indicate the availability to continue to serve as an evaluator.

Section 3.1.5 Responsibilities of the evaluator with the institution

1. Participate in a meticulous research of the institution, program or occupational schools on the strengths and areas that require improvement. An exit conference will be held between the review team at the facility, the members of faculty and administrative staff, including the director and a student representative.
2. Verify and validate the image projected on the self-assessment by the institution or program.
3. Check, through the analysis of the evidence presented, the information obtained from the self-assessment.
4. To determine the degree of authenticity that reflects the self-evaluation report and the details on the current conditions of the institution.
5. To validate the system or methodology used by the institution to carry out self-evaluation.
6. Verify and validate the scope of its findings and how those correspond to the needs and objectives of the institutions and/or programs.
7. Add any data or document necessary to the self-evaluation report.

Section 3.1.6: Activities prior to the visit

1. Attend and participate actively in the meetings of training.
2. Prepare the work plan of the Evaluation Committee.
3. Prepare a list of the aspects that need to be developed.
4. To clarify the inconsistencies between the self-study and the evaluation guide, if any.
5. Analyze the effectiveness in the achievement of the objectives.
6. Prepare a list of the people who you want to interview.
7. Make a list of the weaknesses and strengths of the institution and its programs.

Section 3.1.7 To expect during the visit of the facilities

In the following, is outlined a series of regular activities that occur before, during, and after the visit in the facilities. It is important that both the evaluation committee and the steering committee of the institution and the director meets to reach an agreement on the strategies and the agenda that will continue during the visit and interviews of evaluation.

1. Initial Interview with the head of the institution and with the Steering Committee which prepared the report of self-evaluation.
2. Getting to know the rest of the institution community.
3. Review Group of the self-assessment and of the aspects related to the standards of the SAA that require attention.
4. Observation visits and interviews of individual and group assessment.

Section 3.1.8: Preparation of the Report.

1. Exit conference with the steering committee and director.
2. Evaluation report submitted by each member of the evaluation committee: quantitative and qualitative.
3. Study and analysis of the self-assessment documents
4. The self-evaluation documents submitted by the institution and its programs represent its effort in the accreditation process. The institution has devoted time and energy to carry out their self-evaluations.

The documents will be:

1. The main resource of information on the institution that will receive the visit.
2. An index of the approach to be used in the evaluation.

3. The focal point of the committee during the evaluation visit.

Article 3.2: The Evaluation Process

Section 3.2.1: Rating

During the visit, and by making use of the self-evaluation submitted by the institution, the evaluator will make a mark in his analysis of the indicators that are in disagreement on the rating assigned by the institution. To support their observations, the evaluator will a red mark in the space provided for these purposes and assigned the rating that it deems appropriate. It will also prepare the narrative report and the overall evaluation

Before leaving the institution, the evaluator will deliver reports to the leader of the committee and the signed originals to the SAA representative.

Section 3.2.2 Individual Reports

Each member of the evaluation committee will provide a narrative report about their observations, findings and recommendations. This report should be as complete as possible and will be used by the leader of the committee to draft the final evaluation report. The following documents are required:

1. Use the forms of narrative report for the areas of administrative performance, program or general education performance, as applicable, in order to render the report.
2. Complete each section of the header as shown.
3. Include the findings that correspond to the columns identified with the titles of "strengths", "weaknesses" and "recommendations". It is suggested that each area marked as in need of improvement ("weak") detailing recommendations for correction may be included. Areas of improvement will be based on the analysis of the evidence and in the ratings of indicators.
4. Every narrative report is confidential, it contains privileged information and it is the responsibility of the Evaluator Committee leader and the SAA representative to ensure that all copies have been delivered in an appropriate manner.

Include a certification of the mandatory interviews.

Section 3.2.3: Exit Conference

After reaching a consensus on the results of the evaluation, the Evaluation Committee will meet with the directors of the institution and with the Steering Committee.

This meeting is known as the Exit Conference and here only participate the Steering Committee and the people in the institution receiving the invitation of the director.
The purpose of this conference is to inform the institution and their programs in general terms about the findings. The preliminary report is the product of the members of the Evaluation Committee analysis.

Section 3.2.4: Final Report of the leader of the Committee

The main responsibility of the leader of the Evaluation Committee is to prepare the final report that will be sent in writing. The report is a compendium of all the documents and reports submitted by each member of the Evaluation Committee, as well as the notes taken during the interviews with the teachers, students and employers. It is a document which must be coherent and developer on the findings and recommendations of the Committee. The leader of the evaluation team has up to 5 working days to submit the final report of the visit to the SAA. The director of the SAA has up to 15 working days to send the reports to the director of the institution who, in turn, has 15 working days in which to submit responses to the executive director of the SAA.
Group discussions are vital in the preparation of this report. The consensus of opinion is important, but the differences should be included in the report of the leader. The final evaluation meeting of the Committee, prior to the conference, it is the opportunity to clarify the basic concepts of evaluation and a summary defined and clear on the findings and recommendations. It is also an opportunity for each member to work with the leader in the preparation of the final report.
The following are required:

1. Use of the format provided by the leader of the Evaluation Committee to the SAA.
2. Complete the information required in each of the sections of the form
3. Include in the document all the weaknesses and strengths observed, in addition to the reported by the institution. This will facilitate future evaluations in which you can determine whether the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee will be implemented to correct the findings.
4. The evaluators should interview the following persons: members of the faculty, administrative staff, students, employers, members of the steering committee and

other appropriate persons. The evaluators also must submit a certification of such evidence as part of the report.

5. Submit to the SAA the narrative report of the Evaluation Committee on or before 5 working days after the visit.
6. Send a copy of the report of the Evaluation Committee by regular mail, a copy by e-mail and a copy on a CD-RW or "pen drive". The leader will retain a copy of the report.

Before you deliver copies of the self to the SAA, the leader will ensure the following:

1. Make a copy as "Official Report of the Committee". The leader will ensure that the report is complete and accurate. This document will become a permanent copy of the files of the SAA.
2. Include the signature of the evaluator that verified the document.
3. Deliver the documents of the self-study to the SAA as soon as the evaluation process is completed.
4. Maintain the confidentiality of part of the Evaluation Committee on the information that was obtained from the institution; it should not be discussed with anyone.

Article 3.3: Evaluation of the process of the on-site visit

Section 3.3.1: Related to the process

In addition to the final evaluation, the group leader must submit to the SAA the form with the recommendations and comments on the process of the report, known as the "Individual Observations of the members of the Evaluation Committee during the on-site visit".

The recommendations or comments in documents or forms provided by the SAA must address the evaluation process, which includes: personal appreciation of the participation in the process; the circumstances that may have affected the process and any other comments that would be reflected in the growth and development of the institution, the SAA and the institution agenda.

Section 3.3.2: Related to the Agency

Every document used by the Evaluation Committee members shall be returned to the Agency. This will take into consideration the commentaries and recommendations to be

submitted to the Board of Examiners of the State Approval Agency for its evaluation, recommendations and make the final decision.

Section 3.3.3: Evaluator's Length of Service

The evaluators are called on the basis of need, taking as a reference the expiration of accreditation in the discipline in which they specialize. What could be annual, every two, three or four years, depending on the date of expiry of the accreditation of the program. The structure of the evaluators does not require a specific date of expiry and are only asked their willingness to remain active in the list of potential evaluators and take the training on the changes in the evaluation process. They can evaluate more than one institution if needed.

Chapter 4: Guidelines

Article 4.1: Administrative Performance

Section 4.1.1: Criterion Number 1 - Administration

1. Vision, mission, objectives, philosophy and ethical standards

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation shall establish its own mission and their own objectives. These components must take into account the requirements of the labor force and must include all the administrative staff in the development of the mission and objectives. The institution is required to publish and keep updated a catalog that report and raise awareness to the general public. In addition, the institution applicant must demonstrate the existence, use and disclosure of the ethical standards.

2. Organization, planning and Credit Hour Policy

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must provide evidence of a systematic process of organization and functionality, in addition to establishing a budget to work with their needs. It must demonstrate a systematic planning, democratic, flexible and realistic approach that includes, but not limited to, schedules, flowcharts, educational and financial planning and use of the Credit Hour Policy.

3. Information Systems

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a database that includes both quantitative and qualitative data, a frame of reference for the planning, decision-making, research, and administrative and programmatic evaluation.

4. . Retention and Employability

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must provide sufficient evidence on its ability to maintain a percentage of retention and employability of not less than 55%.

Section 4.1.2: Criterion Number 2 - Physical Facilities and Security

Every institution interested in being evaluated for approval, should count with an adequate physical facility to offer the educational services and guarantee the safety of the students, teachers and all institution workers. Including but not limited to fire department certification, OSHA and those that apply.

Section 4.1.3: Criterion Number 3 - Learning Resources and Credit Hour Policy

Every institution interested in being evaluated for approval, should count with the appropriate and necessary resources for teaching and learning in order to obtain the expected outcomes and reach the goals those goals must be align with the Credit Hour Policy.

Section 4.1.4. Criterion Number 4 - Students Support, Technical Assistance and Awareness

Every institution interested in being evaluated for approval, shall comply with the established requirements for promotion, recruitment, admission, registration, orientation and counseling, placement, and student support. The institution must ensure that they are offering information and services, as well as guarantee the availability of the necessary resources that would help students in the decision making process in harmony with their academic and professional interests.

Article 4.2: Program Performance

Section 4.2.1: Criterion Number 1 – Program Planning, Organization and the Credit Hour Policy

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a philosophy that reflects a system that values the concepts and fundamental principles of the program. It is necessary that each program can highlight a program, administrative and evaluation plan that ensures the expected results, the resources, the timetable and

the evidence of performance. Each institution must demonstrate and implement a Credit Hour Policy in line with federal guidelines.

Section 4.2.2: Number 2: Equipment, Tools and Materials

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation shall count with the equipment, instruments, materials needed, and the required safety gear and up-to-date in order to achieve the objectives and ensure the achievement of the goals.

Section 4.2.3: Criterion 3: Curriculum and number of Credit Hours

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must be organized, managed and directed to develop the occupational skills, in line with technological developments and trends in the labor force. The institution must demonstrate the availability of a curriculum developed specifically for each program. The curriculum should develop by a specialist and must be aligned with the vision, mission and objectives of the institution and the public which includes the Credit Hour Policy.

Section 4.2.4: Criterion Number 4: Advisory Committee

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation shall create an Advisory Committee composed of students, faculty, employees, and employers, former students of the institution and members of the community. This committee will assist in the process of development and review of the curricular content. The advisory committee should serve as a liaison between the students, teachers and the primary management team of the institution. The committee is also responsible for carrying out a constant evaluation of internal processes and the objectives, mission, vision and the expected results of the institution, to ensure best practices and alignment of the offerings with current needs and social reality. The committee must make at least two meetings a year and keep minutes of the same.

Section 4.2.5: Criterion Number 5: Security and Ethical Standards

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a trained team in charge of protecting the health, safety and the life of the students, faculty, workers, and visitors of the community and establish them as a part of the ethical standards of the institution. It is required that each program develop a security protocol in line with the reality and scale of risk of the program. Each student of the institution must receive initial training on how to manage and use all materials, equipment and tools

provided. Each classroom, workshops and laboratories must submit a written compendium of the security protocol.

Section 4.2.6: Criterion Number 6: Teaching-learning processes

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a teaching staff that demonstrates mastery and expertise in their subject area. It also requires that all teachers go through an interview process, qualification and training to ensure the best teaching practices. Also, it is necessary that the institution designs and implements evaluation and professional development plans for teachers and require of them the daily planning, activities, reports, meetings, evaluations and processes to ensure a quality teaching and learning outcomes expected. Teachers should respect and promote the ethical standards of the institution and must demonstrate knowledge of the public policy including the Credit Hours Policy.

Article 4.3: Performance of the General Education Area

Section 4.3.1: Criterion Number 1 – Program Planning, Organization and the Credit Hour Policy

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a philosophy that reflects a system that values the concepts and principles in the area of general education. It is necessary that the general education area can show a program, administrative and evaluation plan that ensures the expected results, the resources, the timetable and the evidence of performance. Each institution must demonstrate that it has and implements the Credit Hour Policy in line with federal guidelines.

Section 4.3.2: Number 2: Equipment, Tools and Materials

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation shall have the equipment, tools and materials needed and up-to-date in order to achieve the objectives and ensure the achievement of the goals.

Section 4.3.3: Number 3: Curriculum and Credit Hour Policy

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must be organized, managed and directed to develop the occupational skills, in line with technological developments and trends in the labor force. The institution must demonstrate the availability of a curriculum developed specifically for each program. The curriculum should be developed by an expert; it must be aligned with the vision, mission and objectives of

the institution and the public policy of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico, which includes the Credit Hour Policy.

Section 4.3.4: Number 4: Security and Ethical Standards

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a trained team in charge of protecting the health, safety and the life of the students, faculty, workers, and visitors of the community and establish them as a part of the ethical standards of the institution. It is required that each program develop a security protocol in line with the reality and scale of risk of the program. Each student of the institution must receive initial training on how to manage and use all materials, equipment and tools provided. Each classroom, workshops and laboratories must submit a written compendium of the security protocol.

Section 4.3.5: Number 5: The Teaching-learning processes, Ethical Standards and the Credit Hour Policy

Each institution interested in receiving evaluation for accreditation must have a teaching staff that demonstrates mastery and expertise in their subject area. It also requires that all teachers go through an interview process, qualification and training to ensure the best teaching practices. Also, it is necessary that the institution designs and implements evaluation and professional development plans for teachers and require of them the daily planning, activities, reports, meetings, evaluations and processes to ensure a quality teaching and learning outcomes expected. Teachers should respect and promote the ethical standards of the institution and must demonstrate knowledge of the public policy including the Credit Hours Policy.

Article 4.4: Results of the Quantitative Evaluations

If the institution obtained from 94 to 100 % in the evaluation area would have a four-year accreditation. To obtain 93 to 87 % would have a three-year accreditation. On the contrary, if the institution obtained from 86 to 80 % would have an accreditation equivalent to two years. All the above are subject to the decision of the Board of Examiners, which would have the power to consider other scenarios, in addition that the final decision would rest in the hands of the Advisory Commission, in its role as the official examiner, in the event of an appeal process. Finally, this area will not be able to get more time of accreditation that the administrative area.

1. For the accreditation of the institution's administrative area it will reach a minimum of 80% in the evaluation.
2. Approval of Program Area
    a. For the accreditation of the program area of the institution it will reach a minimum of 80% in the evaluation.
3. Approval of General Education Area
    a. For the accreditation of the General Education area of the institution it will reach a minimum of 80% in the evaluation.

Chapter 5: Approval Process

The mission of the SAA is to evaluate, certify and authorize public postsecondary occupational and technical education programs. The Board of Examiners will only approve those institutions and programs that demonstrate compliance with the standards and the public policy of the SAA. Each evaluation is to be carried out in accordance with strict measures to ensure an objective and impartial judgment

Article 5.1: Application

One year before the evaluation, each institution shall file a voluntary request for accreditation or re-accreditation. The request for re-accreditation shall settle 6 months prior to the dead line date of the accreditation. With regard to the new programs these are evaluated in its entirety, since there is no process of pre-registration of it. The voluntary application of re-accreditation must be submitted with 6 months prior to the expiration date. The voluntary application for accreditation of a new program in a pre-accredited institution must be submitted 6 months prior to the start of the course which is planned and evaluated in its entirety, since there isn't a previews evaluation and accreditation process. The voluntary application of an institution to be accredited for the first time requires you to be licensed by the Puerto Rico Educational Council and must submit the request with 6 months in advance of the date that they plan to begin to offer the new program. It is the voluntary process to establish the strengths and weaknesses in the performance of the educational programs and the institutional operations, including achievements of objectives and corrective actions for the weaknesses.

Article 5.2: Self-study

Institutions are required to submit to the SAA a folder of self-study so that it may reflect an overview of the guidelines and procedures of the institution. This report should include information on the operations of the last 6 months of the institution or the semester prior to the evaluation visit, as applicable. The SAA staff is available to help institutions to conduct its preliminary self-study and to identify the data and information necessary for the evaluation on site visit. The self-study provides advanced information to the evaluation team, which is in a process of saving time and in the development of efficiency during the field visits. The self-study is a qualitative evaluation that measures the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and that it meets the objectives according to the work plan. The Steering Committee of the self-study will include a representative portion of the administrative staff, members of the faculty, students and the governing body of the institution. It provides more information on the Steering Committee later in this document.

Section 5.2.1: Process of Self Study

The institution works with the SAA to designate a date for the presentation of the self-study.

In accordance with the institution, the SAA designates a deadline to complete and submit the self-study.

The SAA staff will be available to provide technical support for the presentation of the self-study.

The institution sends the complete self-study to the SAA in a paper copy and three CD-RW or "pen drive" for each program to be evaluated.

Once the institution is ready for the field visit, the SAA coordinates a date with the team of evaluators.

The SAA notifies the institution of the date and the names of evaluators who will visit the institution.

If the institution is aware that it is not ready for the field visit should contact the SAA executive director and provide the rationale and evidence that cause the application of a new date to start the evaluation process.

The self-study will be submitted to the Evaluation Team one month before the deadline for the on-site visit, for its analysis and clarify doubts prior to the field visit.

The staff of the SAA will compile the comments and recommendations of the Evaluation Team members and sends them to the institution to prepare for the visit.

The staff of the institution will collect information to address the comments of the evaluators before the field visit.

Institutions or programs must obtain a minimum of 80% all areas in the overall evaluation. In addition, if it get 80 to 86%, obtains two years accreditation, if it gets 87% to 93% gets three years accreditation and finally if you get 94 to 100% gets four years accreditation. A program cannot have more years of accreditations that the administrative area.

Article 5.3: The Steering Committee

Institutions should establish an *ad hoc steering committee* for purposes of the self-study activities and on-site visits. The self-study steering committee is an essential part of the accreditation process and will include a representative portion of administrative staff, members of the faculty, students, and the governing body of the institution. This committee will assist in the development and review process of the self-study activities and must be present during the on-site visit of the evaluators.

Article 5.4: The evaluation on-site visit

As stated above, there is a maximum of two days for full review and a minimum of 1 day for the evaluation of the programs. Some institutions may require more days due to the amount of programs offered or their locations. The agenda will be determined by the institution and the SAA before the on-site visit, with the purpose of ensuring efficiency and a good time management.

During the afternoon of the second day (in a two-day visit), each team will provide their leader a preliminary consolidated report to include the comments and results. The Evaluators will deliver to the leader of the Evaluation Committee strengths and areas to improve. The written report will include strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. The report will also include recommendations.

The oral report:

It should be clear; must cover only the essential points (remember that this is an official report). It is not a forum for debate or argument.

Article 5.5: Report of the Findings

After receiving the report of the Evaluation Committee, the SAA shall submit a report to the institution under evaluation during the next 15 working days. The institution will then have 15 days to respond to the report of findings. In addition, institutions have the opportunity to submit additional material relevant to the facts and conclusions of the written report of the visiting team, before the SAA continues the process sending the institutions reaction report and the improvement plan to the Board of Examiners. The final decision can be either approve, revoke, denied, or reinstate to the approval process.

1. If the institution does not respond within 15 working days, the preliminary report will be sent to the Board of Examiners of the SAA for review and consideration, and the Board of Examiners will make recommendations to the SAA.
2. If the institution responds with comments or supporting documents within 15 days, the SAA will review and if necessary will bring together the original evaluators of the facilities.
3. The SAA will update the preliminary report to include the decision of the evaluators after considering the evidence presented by the institution.
4. The preliminary report with the determination of the evaluators will refer to the Board of Examiners.
5. The Board of Examiners will make comments and recommendations to the SAA on the status of approval.
6. The SAA will review the preliminary report and send the final report to the institution.

Article 5.6: Accreditation Status

1. A status showing that the institution meets all required standards or that has submitted a compliance plan that will enable them to fulfill in a period of six (6) calendar months.
   a. Revocation: a status that is after the institution loses its authorization due to the lack of compliance with the standards of the SAA.
   b. Denied: Status that demonstrates that the institution does not comply with all or a significant amount of the standards or that the compliance plan is not satisfactory in accordance with the standards of the SAA.

c. Restitution: Status that shows that an institution previously revoked presents new evidence that proves its compliance, or the process to comply with all the standards of the SAA.

Article 5.7: Appeal of a status of Accreditation

Any institution or program pending appeal will continue with the status of approval until a final decision is made. If the final written determination is rejected, it is revoked or keeps the institution with a corrective plan (with a specific statement of the reasons), the director of the institution or program shall have the right to start an appeal process of evaluation as described below:

Section 5.7.1: First Stage

The institution or program that receives the final written determination on the refusal, revocation or accreditation pending status shall submit a request in writing within the next 10 days after notification to initiate an appeal process. The deadline shall be calculated using the date of issuance of the notification or pending. In this communication, the institution shall indicate the specific reasons for requesting the appeal.

Section 5.7.2: Second Stage

The review must be in writing and addressed to the Board of Examiners of the SAA. The institution will have the opportunity to provide pertinent evidence, relevant and justifiable for the evaluation or review of the status.

The Board of Examiners has up to 30 working days after receiving the request, to analyze and respond to the institution director. The Board of Examiners may visit or call the institution with the purpose of verifying or review any condition that has been addressed during the reconsideration process. The Board of Examiners must complete all visits and phone calls before presenting the recommendations. A record shall be prepared for each visit, call or meeting.

If the institution director is in disagreement with the decision of the Board of Examiners, even after the second stage, it may request a third and final review. For this stage, the director shall have 10 working days after receiving the response from the Board of Examiners. On this occasion, the review shall be sent directly to the Advisory Commission.

Section 5.7.3: Third and final stage

The Advisory Commission, in their examiners role, has up to 20 days after receiving the request, to analyze and respond to the letter of appeal of the director. As part of the process, the Advisory Commission shall serve as the hearing officer and it will be able to visit or call the institution with the purpose of verifying any condition that has been addressed during the reconsideration process. All visits or calls must be made before the presentation of the report of recommendations.

The final determination must be supported by the findings and the reasons for such findings. Based on the findings, the SAA will provide the institution with a written report of the final decision, which will be one of the following:

Retain the original determination

Amend the original determination

Revoke the original determination and send the decision in writing to the SAA to continue with the regular procedure

A copy of the final determination to the secretariat of the United States Department of Education (USDE) and the Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (DEPR). Prepare minutes of each meeting, phone call or visit and will be filed in the office of the SAA.

This stage culminates the administrative process and any decision shall be final. Interested parties should convene another forum or mechanism to review a decision of the SAA.

Section 5.7.4: Follow-up Visits

1. After the final determination of accreditation, the SAA will visit the accredited institution, once per semester. The first visit is with prior notification.
2. Conduct a fact-finding report.
3. The report will be submitted to the Advisory Commission for the determination and evaluation of the same.
4. The Advisory Commission will determine whether the institution has complied with the provisions of the Plan of Improvement.
5. The AEA may carry out monitoring visits without prior notice.

Chapter 6: Institutional Policies

Article 6.1 Credit Hour's policy

The United States Department of Education issued regulations on the definition of credit hours and on the guidance of its implementation. The establishment of credit hours is necessary because students are awarded financial aid based on the enrolment in the courses and in the amount of credits. The hour credit, in accordance with the federal Department of Education, is: "a unit of measure that gives value to the level of instruction, academic rigor and time requirements for a course that is taken in an educational institution". (A guide to the institutions and accrediting agencies on the credit hours as defined in the final regulations published on 29 October 2010"). (*Guidance to Institutions and Accrediting Agencies Regarding a Credit Hour as defined in the Final Regulations Published on October 29, 2010*).

The document states that: "In its most basic sense, an hour credit is a representative measure of a quantity of student learning. The community of higher education credit hours has been used from long ago, as defined by the Carnegie unit and as part of a process to establish a standard measure of workload of the faculty, the costs of instruction, educational efficiency rates and the measure of student work for transfer students".

Make use of the federal standards allows the SAA establish a consistent measure on the minimum requirements for a student academic load. The SAA will review the policy of Credit Hours of each requesting institution or program in order to check its alignment with federal and state regulations. From the point of view of the SAA, the credit hour is a measure that reflects the expected learning outcomes and that sets the student achievement expected for a certain amount of time, aligned with the equivalence of the institution.

The review of the institutions will be based on the results of learning established and verifiable. The SAA will also review the allocation of credit hours of the institution, in accordance with the conversion of time credit/clock of the SAA, as described below:

For programs leading to academic degrees will be used the following equation:

An academic year is equivalent to a period of two semesters with a minimum of 12 credits per semester. The semesters will have a minimum of 16 weeks.

Credit hours are set:

15 theory hours = 1 credit

20 lab hours = 1 credit

45 internship/occupational practice hours = 1 credit

60 clinic hours = 1 credit

One credit is equivalent to 60 hours of clinic.

For programs leading to certificates and occupational programs will use the following equation:

An academic year is equivalent to a period of two semesters The semesters will have a minimum of 16 weeks.

The credit hours granted to the programs meet the definition of a credit hour under the Higher Education Act of 2010 (HEA), Section 34 CFR 600.2 for purposes of federal programs and provisions related to the accrediting agencies on the determinations of the institutions in terms of credit hours or other measures of student work under subsection (f) of 34 CFR 600.2, for purposes of economic assistance programs for students of Title IV.

The institution provides clock hours and credit may be granted on the basis of the documentation related to the amount of work that an average student is expected to complete within a predetermined amount of time.

Section 6.1.1 Methodology for Credit Hour Calculation

The institution should identify, within each course, the different capabilities (concepts, skills, attitudes, and skills) to which the student must be exposed to receive the recognition that employers in the field of study chosen consider useful.

The institution shall identify the various educational activities that are necessary to achieve the skills and knowledge necessary to receive a diploma, degree or certificate. These activities are: hours of classroom, direct instruction of the faculty that can be outside of classroom, laboratory work, internships and community service. These activities will be aligned with the various issues or themes.

A "CREDIT HOUR" is the unit of measuring educational CREDIT, usually based on the number of classroom hours per week throughout a term (DEFINITION OF "CREDIT HOUR" - THE CARNEGIE UNIT: HOW TO CALCULATE STUDENT CONTACT HOURS).

1. A unit of credit equates to three hours of student work per week (1-hour lecture plus 2 hours of homework or 3 hours of lab) for 16 weeks.
2. Short courses are prorated so they contain the same number of hours as if the course were scheduled for a full semester. To maintain the integrity of the instructional program, care must be taken when scheduling short courses so that there is adequate time for students to complete homework assignments or by arrangement laboratory assignments

Section 6.1.2: Applicability

The institution is responsible for determining the hour credit for each course in accordance with the definition of the federal program of a credit hour. Educational institutions should review their policies and procedures for determining the credit hours and the implementation of its programs and each course, to take appropriate action to comply with the credit hour policy before applying for accreditation or re-accreditation by the SAA. To the educational institutions that grant certificates will be required to apply the definition of credit hours to the policy established. The lack of fulfillment of the institution's policy of credit hours will result in a negative recommendation and a plan of correction immediately. The review of compliance with the credit hour policy and of all standards will be continuous and the SAA may make unannounced visits to confirm the implementation of all policies and objectives. If the SAA knows about a situation of non-compliance related to the credit Hour policy, the SAA will activate the special report mechanism described in this document.

The SAA notifies to the secretariat of the United States Department of Education and the Secretary of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico for corresponding action.

Article 6.2: Grievances and processes of individual complaints against decisions of institutions or programs

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to give the opportunity to have a procedure that can help resolve grievances as quickly and as fairly as possible, for people who have been affected by a decision or action taken by some institution and approved by the SAA; the procedure should remain aligned with public policy, with the due process of law and equal legal protection.

I. What is a complaint and what should it include?

It is important to stress that, in accordance with the policy and procedures of the SAA, a grievance is a written notification which evaluates and establishes a complaint against an institution or program accredited by the SAA. The complaint must include the complainant's name, address and phone number and detail and highlight the issue is complaint.

The complaint must express:

To unethical action in accordance with the ethical standards of the SAA, the use of false information or changes that are in violation of the policies established and published in the rules of procedure of the SAA. The complaint must be accurate enough to identify with clarity: (1) the situation; (2) the complainants; (3) the institution or program against whom the allegations are made; and (4) the opportunity for the institution or program to respond to the allegations made.

Article 6.3: Ethical Standards required to Institutions

One of the purposes of the visits to the facility by the Evaluation Committee is to verify that the institution has standards for managing institutional plans, administrative, programmatic and evaluation. The SAA will require that the evaluation team to undertake a review of the current ethical standards. The lack of standards may result in a delay in the accreditation process and can give way to a written recommendation of the Committee. The institution applicant must prove that all your standards and procedures are ethical. This includes, but is not limited to: recruitment, advertising, transcripts, tuition reimbursement and fair, and location services to students. The ethical standards of the institutions should include at least:

Section 6.3.1: Institutional Policy on the discontinuation or Close Programs

The institution must provide a document that establishes the policy that applies to the close or discontinue a program. The document should contain all kinds of opportunities for students to complete the requirements of the programs and obtain their degree. Alternatives may include, but are not limited to, online courses, courses under contract and study sessions.

Section 6.3.2: Academic Honesty and Integrity

The institution must provide evidence of policy related to intellectual property and with the personal and social well-being of the student. The institution shall not tolerate plagiarism, fraud, the changes of note, the ideological falsification, false documentation, identity or practice, or any act that is opposed to the identity of the intellectual product of a student or any person: Any of these actions will be considered illegal and legal measures shall be submitted and severe discipline.

Section 6.3.3: Compliance with the policy of Credit Hours

The institution must provide evidence of its policy of Credit Hours, which must be aligned with the provisions of the Federal Higher Education Act (HEA) and with the federal regulations, as amended.

Section 6.3.4: Confidentiality of Student Records

The institutions must follow federal regulations on the handling of documents and information of the students (Federal Privacy Law on the Family Educational Rights of 1974 or FERPA, for its acronym in English). The institution will not produce or disseminate any student information without the written consent of the student or student's parent or guardian, if the student is less than 18 years. Every student has the right to receive a copy of its file and to receive information about any change or practice that could affect your files. The student also has the right to request revisions and corrections of any errors in its file.

Section 6.3.5: Security and students right to know

The institution must comply with federal regulations on matters of security in institutions of higher education (The Law of Right Knowledge of Students and the safety of the campus, or *Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act* of 1990). As set out in this Law, each participating institution in higher education programs should be disseminated to students all information related to the institutional, operational and academic, economic aid, security matters and any other relevant and important information that may affect the student.

Section 6.3.6: Policy of non-discrimination

The institution shall ensure equal protection of the law to employees and students. The institution shall not discriminate in any way to any student or prospectus by reason of age,

race, color, sex, birth, veteran status, political or religious ideology, origin or social status, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability or physical or mental impairment; or being a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. The institution understands its obligation to periodically review and update the policies of non-discrimination to include changes and new requirements.

Section 6.3.7: Sexual Harassment Policy

The institution must provide written evidence of a sexual harassment policy; it should also include evidence of training to teachers and other staff and awareness to students about what is sexual harassment and how to file a complaint of sexual harassment. The institution will not tolerate a single practice or of sexual harassment.

Section 6.3.8: The Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), for its acronym in English)

No student shall be discriminated against on the basis of any condition or physical or mental disability. The institution must demonstrate the ability to provide reasonable accommodation for these students and to ensure that staff received appropriate training.

Section 6.3.9: Rights and Responsibilities of Students

Every student has the right to receive an education that is not limited to the classroom. The institution will provide other activities and strategies to enrich the academic life of the student as, for example, peer coaching activities, collaborative activities with other students, teachers and other staff within the educational environment, and the availability of resources such as libraries, technology or data centers, among others. Students have the responsibility to behave appropriately and not interfering with the educational rights of other students on campus.

Section 6.3.10: Drugs and Controlled Substances

The institution must establish a policy for a drug-free environment. This policy should include information about the use and abuse of illegal drugs, alcohol, and other potentially harmful substances. The institution must have the skills and information needed to guide students on prevention and rehabilitation programs are available that work with dependence on alcohol and drugs.

Section 6.3.11: Fair and Equitable Services for Students

The institutions must demonstrate that provide the same opportunities and access to information for all students. Students must know their rights from the recruitment process and during their studies at the institution. Students will have consistent and up-to-date information on available economic aid, payment plans, extensions and deferrals. The institution must demonstrate the existence of a policy of reimbursement or refund aligned with the federal provisions and the process on hoe they will be disseminated to the students. Students should know that they have the right to submit complaints to the SAA on any matter or violation.

Article 6.4Semi-Annual Report

Twice a year, accredited institutions must submit a compliance report to the SAA, the first report will be delivered on the last Friday of the month of January of each year and the second, the third Friday of June of each year. In the Semi-annual report will be delivered on the last Friday of the month of January will include the information corresponding to the first academic semester and in the second, the information in the second half of the year. To comply with the report, the institution must include all of the standards for approval. The objective of the report is to ensure the best practices of occupational and technical education, in order to demonstrate compliance with the institutions and to allow the SAA use the information obtained to improve the evaluated institutions.

There will be an initial review to ensure that they have submitted materials for each section of the report required. If the material is incomplete, the SAA shall notify the institution and request additional information.

When the report is complete, the SAA will coordinate with the institution to review of the semi-annual report, if necessary.

During the review, the staff will be pending to red flags that may exist and to indicate the areas of deficiency.

If the materials are poor and if red flags have been identified, the AEA and the staff will come to a consensus on the existence of the deficiency.

A letter will be sent to notify the institution on the deficiencies found, together with a request to provide additional evidence.

The SAA will review additional materials and come to a consensus on the sufficiency of the evidence.

The institution will receive notification that met the standards and that it will continue with the full approval status.

Section 6.4.1 Semi-Annual Report Process

The SAA will receive the reports, which will be strikeouts with the date in which they were received.

There will be an initial review by means of a rubric to ensure that they presented the materials for each section of the report required.

If material is missing, the SAA shall notify the institution to request additional information.

When the report is complete, the AEA will coordinate a review of the annual report within a meeting of the Advisory Commission. This meeting is part of the Advisory Commission work plan.

During the review, the Advisory Commission will be attentive to red flags that may indicate areas of deficiency.

If the materials are poor and if identified red flags, the AEA and the staff will come to a consensus on the existence of the deficiency.

A letter will be sent to notify the institution within 10 days indicating the deficiencies identified and requested the provision of additional evidence.

The SAA will review the additional materials to determine if they are in compliance and if it comes to a consensus on the sufficiency of the evidence.

The institution will be notified that they met the standards and will continue with the full approval status within thirty (30) working days from the review process has been initiated.

If an institution does not meet full approval the SAA will prepare a notification letter and the institution must submit a corrective action plan within thirty (30) working days from the date of the letter. The PRSAA will schedule a site visit and the United States Department of Education and the Puerto Rico Department of Education will be notified when an institution does not meet the standards. The Advisory Committee will be the reviewers of the submitted action plans of the non-compliance institutions and they will make the recommendations to the SAA Director.

Article 6.5: Corrective Action Plans

If an institution does not comply with the full approval, the SAA will prepare a letter of notification and the institution must submit a corrective action plan within 30 days of the date of the letter. The SAA schedule a visit to the facilities and notify the PR Department of Education and the USDE when an institution does not comply with the standards. The Advisory Committee will be the reviewers of the action plans submitted by the institutions with compliance and to make recommendations to the director of the SAA. Subsequent reports may be requested from the institution for compliance purposes. Each report requested and submitted after a corrective action plan, can be considered as a special report.

Article 6.6: Special Reports

The special reports must be submitted by the institutions if there were no changes in administrative or programmatic plans previously presented to the SAA; and when a corrective action plan does not comply with the requirements of the SAA. The SAA can request special reports when one of the following occurs:

1. If the institution adds programs
2. An institution closes programs
3. Curriculum Review
4. An institution fails to comply with one or more of the standards due to internal or external factors
5. An institution submitted a corrective action plan that does not comply with the expected requirements
6. Any other substantial change that may affect the opportunities for students and their academic achievement, including and not limited to appointment of director and teachers and classified staff, allocation of funds, fiscal committee.

Article 6.7: Findings and Compliance

The institutions must respond to each finding or failure in its semi-annual report; if they fail to answer any finding or failure, must submit an amendment in its annual report. If the findings or noncompliance are 90 days or more prior to the date of the semi-annual report, should submitted a special report.

Article 6.8: Creation of programs after the Accreditation

The SAA and the program specialist of the area will review the new programs. The director of the institution must sign an affidavit stating that the new program meets all the requirements and standards issued for the institutions, in addition to submit that document and the request in writing to the SAA that eventually it shall submit the request to the Advisory Committee.

Article 6.9: Contingencies

If the SAA came to know of any situation of lack of compliance on ethical practices, which include, but are not limited to recruitment, advertising, transcripts, refunds of student enrollment fair and equitable, and placement services for students, will activate the mechanism of special report described in this manual. In addition, if the SAA comes to know about non-compliance with the credit hour policy, will activate the mechanism of special report.

Article 6.10: Motivation for Innovation

It requires all institutions to report regularly to the SAA strategic plans that include the short- and long-term plans and to establish how to incorporate new strategies, practices that have been shown to be effective and new methods of learning. The SAA expects that all approved institutions and applicants are involved in promoting innovative programs and effective learning experiences. As set out in the document of the USDE, *Investing in America's Future: A Blueprint for Transforming Career and Technical Education* (April 2012) institutions must incorporate an innovation plan in their practices, which is aligned with the needs and capabilities of the present. The institutions must demonstrate that they review and constantly improve their occupational counseling services, which use proven educational strategies - such as the action research and community-based learning, among others, and that provide opportunities for professional development. Taking into consideration the public policy established in the document previously mentioned, it will be prompted to institutions that propose projects that develop or expand innovations and to institute a high academic achievement and a workforce with knowledge and able to solve the most pressing problems facing the nation, both at a local and global level.

Article 6.11: Full Review and Targeted Revision

The programs will be reviewed depending on the day of accreditation. The date of accreditation of some programs will be aligned with the date of accreditation of the institution.

When a block of programs or a simple program requiring reviews, we will be conducting a full review (programmatic, administrative and general education).

Article 6.12: Processes of dissemination, awareness and dissemination

The SAA, publishes in the website of the SAA, all new policies and amendments in order to allow the public to comment, make recommendations or to oppose the changes. All changes will be available on the website of the SAA during 30 days to receive the public opinion. The PRSAA Operational Manual will always be available on the web page www.de.gobierno.pr under the Office of the Secretary; in the link of the SAA, for institutions and the general public can use it as a reference. Printed copies of all regulations and procedures will be available upon request at the offices of the SAA. Also, can be requested by calling the phone number: (787)773-2252.

Chapter 7: Advisory Commission

Article 7.1: Location:

This organization is called the ADVISORY COMMISSION OF THE PR STATE APPROVING PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS OF POSTSECONDARY OCCUPATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION OF PUERTO RICO (PRSAA). Known in Spanish as the *Agencia Estatal Aprobadora (AEA)*. The Commission will be located at the Office of PRSAA.

Article 7.2: The Main Function

The main function of the Commission will be to provide technical support and advice to the SAA staff and the Secretary of Education of the Government of Puerto Rico so that it can maintain best practices during the accreditation process of the applicants. The Commission must select a president and secretary from among the members, in order to achieve its objectives and functions.

Article 7.3 Objective of the Commission

To perform the better practices in approval in order to accredit the mayor number of institutions those are into compliance in the benefit of students.

Article 7.4: Members, Constitution, Quorum, Meetings and Votes

Section 7.4.1: Constitution

1. The Advisory Commission shall consist of five (5) members and one (1) substitute member who will attend as a listener and shall vote only if there is sufficient quorum. The Commission should include representation of public employment service and employers, employees, occupational and post-secondary educators, educators, students and the general public, including minority groups.
2. Each member of the Commission must know the sector of the academy that represents; the interests and rights of this particular group. A member could represent more than one area.
3. The eligibility of each member shall be taken into consideration the academic training and knowledge of the technical and vocational areas.
4. The PR Commonwealth Department of Education administrative, executives, educational and non-educational or office employee, full time or part time, can't be elected member of the Advisory Commission for five (5) years after the last day worked for the Department.
5. All members are required to demonstrate knowledge and a global vision of the public policy, the acts and rules related to post-secondary education.

Section 7.4.2: Quorum

The quorum shall be constituted by the presence of three (3) of the five (5) members.

Section 7.4.3: Ordinary and extraordinary meetings

1. The meetings will be held at the time, place and date indicated by the SAA at least once in a calendar year and when it is estimated by the president.
2. Extraordinary meetings may be requested by the chairman of the Commission as often as necessary, provided the communication shall be in writing or by e-mail that is addressed to all the members of the Committee.
3. Vote - Each member of the Commission shall be entitled to one (1) vote on any matter brought to the Commission.
4. The electronic voting will be permitted to accelerate processes

Article 7.5: Terms and Vacancies of the Commission Members

Section 7.5.1: Terms

1. The term of office of the members of the Commission shall be two (2) consecutive years, with the exception of the President, which shall be three (3) consecutive years.
2. The members of the Commission serve for a maximum of three (3) terms six (6) years and nine (9) years for the office of the president.

Section 7.5.2: Vacancy

1. Any vacancy that occurs before the expiry of the time limit; shall be appointed by the SAA.
2. Any member who resigns may be re-elected after a waiting period of twelve (12) months.
3. If a member fails to attend three (3) consecutive meetings, the Commission and the SAA will take into account and analyze the reasons for those absences, if the reasons are not sufficient or are not justified, the position will be declared as a vacancy. This position will be covered by the SAA not later than two (2) months following the declaration of the vacancy with the advice and assistance of the rest of the members of the Commission.

Article 7.6: Roles, Responsibilities, scope, the ethical conflicts and interests and lobbying activities

The Advisory Commission is the branch counselor of the SAA. Also, the decision-making process with its own procedures, roles and responsibilities.

Section 7.6.1: Roles and Responsibilities

1. To meet regularly, at least once every two months.
2. To prepare, maintain and archive documents for the sessions of the meeting.
3. Review, analyze, recommend and develop documents, policies and practices changes.
4. To elect a President and a Secretary from among the members of the Commission.
5. Review and recommend procedures for the execution of programmatic activities.

6. Improve the performance of the programs through monitoring, in accordance with the rules of the SAA indicators of ethics, quality and quantity.
7. Update and recommend appropriate administrative and educational policies to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations.
8. Design and provide a guide for staff's activity programs.
9. Create links of communication and awareness between the institutions, the SAA and state and federal officials.
10. Develop action plans to engage members of the community and the students in the processes of the SAA.
11. To provide training, seminars and conferences in the field of administration, education and information on the labor market.
12. Coordinate the administration and evaluation of the program plan with the state and federal agency.
13. Review all the rules, policies and procedures on a regular basis that includes the implementation and integration of the students and members of the community in the processes, taking into account the good practices and public policy changes.

Section 7.6.2: the scope of the Commission, Ethics and interests, conflicts and lobbing activities

The Commission will be part of the decision-making process within the SAA and the pursuit of the objectives on behalf of students and members of the academic community. The Commission will be an essential part of the approval process of the institutions and may not have contradictions or conflicts of interest ethics. No member of the Commission will be allowed to receive or exchange of gifts, money or any type of compensation for services rendered. Members must also maintain the appearance of any conflict or quid pro quo and behavior. Members of the Commission cannot act as a pressure group for public institutions or secondary to the United States Department of Education or the Puerto Rico Department of Education.

Article 7.7: Roles and Responsibilities of the president and the secretary

Section 7.7.1: On the President.

Convene and hold regular and special meetings

1. Call special meetings if necessary

2. To exercise the other functions related to the office
3. Prepare an agenda for each meeting designated
4. To maintain order and control during the meetings
5. Sign and approve minutes of meetings
6. To represent the Commission in the official activities and communications

Section 7.7.2: About the secretary

Keep a permanent record of all meetings

1. Publish and distribute to all members copies of the minutes of each meeting of the Commission in good condition.
2. Prepare and send notices of all meetings to members in good standing.
3. Prepare under the request of the President, the agendas of meetings and send it by e-mail to all members at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.
4. Keep and maintain a list with all the measures, the documents and the rules adopted by the Commission
5. In the absence of the president, shall call the meeting and proceed to the election of a temporary President ad interim.
6. Must conduct the correspondence of the Commission.

Article 7.8: General Provisions

Section 7.8.1: Document Assurance and Management

The original documents, copies, agendas, minutes, attendance sheets, sheets of referendum, letters and archives applicants will be kept in the general archives of the SAA.

Section 7.8.2: Confidentiality

Each member of the Commission shall preserve the confidentiality of the issues and topics in the regular and special meetings for which no decision has yet been taken. The dissemination of information should always be with the authorization of the SAA.

Section 7.8.3: Supplementary or new rules and internal procedures

Each member of the Commission shall take part in the decision-making process. Once you have voted, by a rule or process this becomes final and must be respected and recognized by all members of the Commission.

Chapter 8: Board of Examiners

Article 8.1: Location

This organization is called the Board of Examiners of the PR STATE APPROVING Agency, (PRSAA), the acronym SAA. The address and the main office of the Board will be where is located the office of the SAA.

Article 8.2: Objectives:

The main objectives and functions of the Board of Examiners are the following:

1. Collaborate with the SAA in the achievement of its objectives.
2. Provide assistance with a view to strengthening the quality of academic offerings of the institutions.
3. Take the decision of approve, deny, revoke or reinstate a requesting institution.
4. Work in collaboration with the Advisory Committee of the SAA in the better interest of the vocational, occupational and technical education of Puerto Rico.

Article 8.3: Members Eligibility, Notification and Training Process

Section 8.3.1: Eligibility

The criteria used for the selection of the members are:

1. Preparation and educational experience as a teacher or administrator in the occupational, vocational and technical education areas.
2. Degree of knowledge of the relevant characteristics of a post-secondary institution in terms of organization, management and operation of education programs.
3. The PR Commonwealth Department of Education administrative, executives, educational and non-educational or office employee, full time or part time, can't be elected member of the Advisory Commission for five (5) years after the last day worked for the Department.
4. No member of the Board shall have an interest in or to carry out activities in conflict with the aims and purposes of the SAA.
5. You must submit a resume or "Curricum Vitae" updated for the file in the SAA.
6. Once selected, every member will receive a notification letter. Copy of this letter must be signed by the member and filed by the SAA.

7. Every new member must receive compulsory trainings appointed by the SAA, being the first one the operational and programmatic presentation of the Agency. Any member who is absent from the compulsory trainings will be removed from the Board and will have to wait a period of two (2) years for reconsideration

Section 8.3.2: Roles and Responsibilities

1. Receive and consider the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee to recommend to the SAA the accreditation, suspension or denial of a program or public post-secondary institution of vocational and technical education to participate in the federal financial aid programs.
2. Analyze the Report of Reactions and the Improvement Plan that submits then institution after having received the report of findings submitted by the SAA.
3. To recommend to the SAA the crediting period the Administrative Area, General Education and the Program Area.
4. Reassess recommendations issued. In the case of the evaluated institution does not accept the decision made, the board may take relevant decisions, in accordance with the rules and procedures approved by the SAA, the Advisory Board may take the final decision.

Article 8.4: Procedures

1. The evaluators through its leader issued the Report of Findings.
2. The SAA immediately receives it writes to the evaluated institution and sends the findings report who should in turn submit it thirty days with the reaction to the Report and the Plan of improvements to correct the findings.
3. The SAA receives the report analyzes it and convenes the Board of Examiners to assess the reports and any other evidence submitted, if any, along with the recommendation of the evaluators and through a sheet of Referendum issued the final recommendation on the period for which it is to be credited or, on the contrary, the denial or condition (s) of any of the programs evaluated for their accreditation.
4. Once you receive the report of the Board of Examiners, the SAA communicates with the director of the evaluated institution and informs them the decision of the Board of Examiners and its recommendations, if any of the programs that has been given specific guidelines for accreditation.

5. The SAA notifies the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico and to the Office of the Director of Certification and Eligibility of Postsecondary Schools of Vocational and Technical Education in the Office of the Secretary of Education in the United States.

Article 8.5: Composition, Quorum and Meetings

Section 8.5.1: Composition:

The Board will consist of five (5) members and one (1) Substitute member who will attend as a listener and shall vote only if there is insufficient quorum.

Section 8.5.2: Quorum

The quorum is determined as the presence of three of the five members present in the meeting.

Section 8.5.3: Ordinary and Extraordinary Meetings of the Board:

The Board shall meet as many times as the SAA requires, but shall meet at least three times a year. These meetings will be held at the date, time and place set by the SAA. Special meetings of the Board shall be convened by the president of the board. The SAA can convene, by written request of at least three members who request it.

Article 8.6: Terms of the Members of the Board and Vacancies

Section 8.6.1:

The term of the Board members shall be two years, except that it is president of the group which shall be three years, calculated on the basis of twelve months from the nomination date.

Section 8.6.2: Vacancy:

Any vacancy on the board that is not by expiration of the term of a member shall be covered by the SAA. May be elected again after 12 months from the last participation.

Section 8.6.3:

When a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the Board; the Board and the SAA considered the reasons that gave rise to such absences and if it is determined that they are not justified, declared the vacancy. The vacancy arising in this way will be covered by the SAA as soon as possible, after consultation with the other members.

Article 8.7: General Provisions

Section 8.7.1: File of documents:

Copy of the documents, agendas, minutes, referendum, attendance sheets, copies of letters and documents submitted by the institutions assessed and the SAA, shall be kept always in the general archive of the SAA.

Section 8.7.2: Custody of Documents:

All documents will be in the custody of the SAA. No original documents will be circulated, except when the originals were requested by order of a court of competent jurisdiction, or the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico or the Federal Government.

Section 8.7.3: Dissemination of Information:

Without proper authorization of the SAA, no member of this board will disclose information on the issues raised in the meetings and on which no decision has been taken.

Section 8.7.4: Rules:

1. The members of the Board shall be responsible, collectively and in solidarity, of the decisions taken;
2. Shall be exempt from liability the members who saved their vote in the case of the decision in the act;
3. The absent members in the event of a disagreement with the decisions taken by the other members of the Board shall request in writing during the two (2) months subsequent to the meeting to be recorded in the minutes their disagreement or otherwise you will be consenting and accept the same.

Chapter 9: Compliance:

Article 9.1: General Provisions

1. The institution that does not comply with the provisions of this Manual, the executive director of the agency shall submit a report of non-compliance to the Advisory Committee for appropriate action.
2. The SAA convenes the Advisory Commission to evaluate the reports and any other evidence submitted, if any, and through a written report may issue the determination on the period for which it is accredited or, on the contrary, the denial

or condition (s) of any of the programs evaluated for their accreditation. This will be recorded in a minute.

3. Once you receive the report of the Advisory Commission, the SAA communicates with the director of the evaluated institution and informs them of the decision and if any of the programs has been given specific guidelines for accreditation.
4. The SAA notifies the Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico and to the Office of the Director of Certification and Eligibility of Postsecondary Schools of Vocational and Technical Education in the Office of the Secretary of Education in the United States.

Chapter 10: Amendments and availability of the Manual

Article 10.1: General Provisions

1. These rules may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members of the Commission, cited for these purposes.
2. Any amendment to this manual must be approved by the Advisory Commission and notify the public of the DEPR via the link of the SAA
3. This manual is also available on the link of the SAA. Printed copies of this manual are also available upon request at the offices of the SAA.

Chapter 11: Exclusion Clause:

Article 11.1: General Provisions

1. This Regulation entered into effect once it is approved. If any part is declared invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, this situation will not affect the other parts

References:

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http://www.lasc.edu/students/Credit%20Hour%20Definition%20for%20LASC.pdf
DEFINITION OF "CREDIT HOUR" - THE CARNEGIE UNIT: HOW TO CALCULATE STUDENT CONTACT HOURS

Certification

Dr. Miguel Delgado Rivera, President of the Advisory Commission and Mrs. Ann M. Mockford Negrón, Executive Director of PUERTO RICO STATE APROVING AGENCY, hereby certify that this is the Operational Manual of the PRSAA, effective on August 2017.

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President
Advisory Commission

Ann M. Mockford Negrón
Executive Director
State Approving Agency