Table of contents

DEFINITION, TAXONOMY, LEARNING OUTCOMES 4
  Associate Degree and Bachelors Degree Learning Outcomes 4
  Bachelors Degree-only Learning Outcomes 4
  Graphic Communications Content Taxonomy 5
  Purpose of ACCGC Accreditation 5
  Mission 7
  Program Criteria 7
  Accreditation Authority 7

MEMBERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE 8
  Accrediting Council 8
  Executive Committee 8
  Accreditation Committee 8
  Appeals Committee 9
  Managing Director 9

ACCREDITATION PROCESS AND POLICIES 10
  Application for Accreditation 10
  Selection of a Mentor and Site Visit Team 12
  Self-Study Report 12
  Site Visit 12
  Site Visit Report 13
  Accreditation Term Lengths 13
  Accreditation Committee Action 13
  Appeal Status 14
  New Accreditation Fees 14
  Reaccreditation Fees 14
  Accreditation Review for Programs Outside the Continental USA 14
Annual Maintenance Fee 14
Missing Payment 14
Accreditation Delay 15
Multiple Campus Systems 15

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS 16
1 Mission and Strategic Plan 16
2 Governance/Administration 17
3 Financial Support 17
4 Advisory Committee 18
5 Curriculum 18
6 Learning Outcomes Assessment 19
7 Instructional Facilities 20
8 Staff Support Services 20
9 Internships/Practicums/Cooperative Study 21
10 Faculty 21
11 Faculty Evaluation 22
12 Instruction and Evaluation 22
13 Student Records and Advising 23
14 Graduate Placement and Follow-up 23
15 Diversity and Inclusion 24
DEFINITION, TAXONOMY, LEARNING OUTCOMES

Graphic Communications is a term used for both an industry and an academic discipline. The graphic communications industry provides society with a vast variety of visual consumer information services and products. Examples include products as varied as signage and store decor, individualized postal and email advertising, media rich websites of all kinds, printed and digital edition publications, packaging and labeling in both digital form (for eCommerce sites) and physical form (for product containers), as well as many dozens of other forms of commercial visual media in both printed and digital form.

ACCGC defines the academic discipline of graphic communications as a branch of technology with focus on the history, creation, production, management, and commercial application of visual products in digital and physical form. Graphic communications degree programs include various combinations of a wide range of instructional content, shown in figure 1.0 as a taxonomy.

**Associate Degree and Bachelor’s Degree Learning Outcomes**

As a collegiate academic discipline, students graduating from graphic communications Associate degree programs are expected to have gained the skills and knowledge that will enable them to:

1. Integrate design aesthetics, functionality, and relevancy into graphic communications products, optimizing user experience.
2. Impact production efficiency and product quality across a variety of media by applying knowledge of graphic communications materials, technologies, and practices.
3. Contribute to graphic communications project teams for design, production, and management.
4. Recognize and practice legal and ethical responsibilities concerning the creation, use, and distribution of graphic communications assets or products.
5. Communicate ideas through written, visual, and oral mediums to a wide range of audiences.

**Bachelor’s Degree-only Learning Outcomes**

6. Research and apply new information to solve graphic communications design, production, and management problems.
7. Apply tools and principles in graphic communications business development and production management.
Purpose of ACCGC Accreditation

The accreditation process is designed to assist collegiate educators in the analysis, metrics, and continuous improvement of degree programs. ACCGC accreditation is designed to be a vehicle for assuring academia, industry employers, and society that accredited programs (a) provide students the
academic rigor necessary to develop as more literate, inclusive, adaptable, and productive citizens, and (b) serve students and employers by providing contemporary skillsets required for successful employment in the graphic communications industry.

**Principles of Continuous Improvement**

Undertaking ACCGC accreditation involves all stakeholders (administration, faculty, students, advisory board) in a process to set benchmarks for learning outcomes, analyze the entire educational environment, and then continually measure and improve learning outcomes over time (see figure 2). This program analysis and learning outcomes measurement system is captured in a document called a

**Figure 2 Principles of Continuous Improvement**
self-study. Once completed, an external team of peers reviews the self-study and provides feedback and perspective.

**Mission**

The mission of the Accrediting Council for Collegiate Graphic Communications is to provide viable, credible, and defensible accreditation standards that can be used by colleges and universities offering graphic communications programs, thereby:

a. Developing and strengthening graphic communications programs at the collegiate level.
b. Helping to enhance and maintain quality of instruction through periodic review.
c. Stimulating the exchange of ideas between academia and industry.
d. Providing recognition to those collegiate programs that achieve and maintain acceptable standards.

**Program Criteria**

A major in graphic communications requires a minimum of 30 semester hours of graphic communications course work. A concentration (such as a minor, sequence, emphasis, pattern, etc.) requires at least 18 semester hours of graphic communications courses. Programs with less than these recommended minimums could still be considered, but the institution administrator would need to provide justification and the ACCGC board of directors would need to approve the program.

**Accreditation Authority**

The Accrediting Council for Collegiate Graphic Communications, Inc. (ACCGC) is an independent body of industry and education professionals devoted to promoting excellence in graphic communications education. The ACCGC is dedicated to the improvement of collegiate-level curricula in graphic communications. The Council derives its authority and responsibility for accreditation from its Bylaws.
MEMBERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The ACCGC consists of elected representatives from the following groups: (a) educators from within graphic communications programs at the associate and baccalaureate level, and (b) personnel from the graphic communications industry, including individuals representing graphic communications trade associations and foundations. The ACCGC consists of an Executive Committee, an Accreditation Committee, an Appeals Committee, and various ad hoc committees as needed. A Managing Director provides staff-level administrative support to the Council.

Accrediting Council

The Board of Directors consists of up to nineteen elected representatives from the following groups:

- A maximum of eleven full-time educators from within graphic communications collegiate degree programs. These educators must hold at least a tenure track assistant professor position with at least three-years-experience in industry or as college faculty. A maximum of five of the eleven educators may be involved in associate degree-programs (with the remaining educators involved in baccalaureate and graduate-degree programs).
- A maximum of eight leaders from various facets of the graphic communications industry.

Executive Committee

The President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Chair of the Accreditation Committee comprise a five-member Executive Committee. The immediate past president may be included as an ex-officio sixth committee member. The Executive Committee formulates and proposes policy to the Council and guides the activities of the Managing Director.

Accreditation Committee

This Accreditation Committee consists of at least ten Council members and has the function of granting ACCGC accreditation based on the documentation after the review process.

The Chair of the Accreditation Committee appoints a three-member site visit team for each institution that applies for accreditation, subject to confirmation by the institution. A site visit team will review the self-study, visit the institution and its representatives, and report findings to the Accreditation Committee. Site visit teams will consist of at least two Accreditation Committee members. One team member will be an industry representative. Two team members will be active or retired graphic communications educators from collegiate degree-granting educational institutions. One of the two educators serve as team chair.
**Appeals Committee**

The Appeals Committee consists of a chair and five additional council members who are not current members of the Accreditation Committee and are not affiliated in any way with the appealing institution. The Appeals Committee responds to appeals from institutions denied ACCGC accreditation by the Accreditation Committee. The Appeals Committee votes to uphold or reverse the decision of the Accreditation Committee. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

**Managing Director**

The Managing Director is responsible for the administration of the council’s work. This includes coordinating the accreditation process, maintaining Council records, facilitating and reporting financial matters, providing secretarial support, coordinating site teams and visits, and arranging meetings for the Council. The Managing Director is appointed by the Executive Committee, confirmed by the Board of Directors, and serves at the discretion of the Board of Directors under the general supervision of the Executive Committee.
ACCREDITATION PROCESS AND POLICIES

Application for Accreditation

The Application for Accreditation Review along with a fee of $200.00 must be submitted by a high-ranking administrator (president, academic vice president, or college/school dean). The completed application form and fee will trigger a review by the Accreditation Committee to determine the suitability of the program for ACCGC accreditation. If an affirmative decision is made on program suitability, the application submitter will be notified and the full-fee for accreditation will be required, less the application fee (-$200). The accreditation process will begin September 1st following the receipt of the application fee.
ACCGC Accreditation Process and Chronology

**Chronology**

- **September 1st**
  - 12 month self-study begins

- October 1st
  - Self-study mentor assigned

- At least 3 months prior to visit

- At least one month prior to visit

- Within one month after visit

- Within two weeks of receiving report

- Within two weeks of appeal

- Within two weeks of acceptance

- 6-year or 2-year accreditation begins the following **September 1st**

**Action**

- Application and fee submitted
  - Mentor proposed
    - Reject
      - New mentor proposed
    - Accept
      - Site visit dates collaboratively set

- Site visit
  - Self-study submitted for check
    - Edits required
      - Mentor requests edits
        - Program leader makes edits
    - Self-study approved
      - Program leader requests edits
        - Team chair makes edits
      - Factual report approved

- Final report reviewed by program
  - Accreditation committee votes
    - No accredit -- appeal
      - Decision upheld or reversed
        - Yes accredit
    - Yes accredit
      - Process complete
Selection of a Mentor and Site Visit Team

The Managing Director informs the chair of the Accreditation Committee of the request for an accreditation review. The chair of the Accreditation Committee appoints a chair for the site visiting team. The chair for the site visiting team is appointed subject to confirmation by the administrator who made the request for accreditation review. During the self-study process, the chair for the site visiting team acts as a mentor to the representatives of the institution, aiding them as needed in preparing the self-study report and the site visit schedule. The chair of the Accreditation Committee, before receiving the completed self-study report, appoints the remaining members of the site visiting team. These appointments are also subject to confirmation by the institution’s administrator who requested the accreditation review.

Self-Study Report

Within 12 months of ACCGC receiving the application for accreditation review, the program self-study report should be prepared and submitted for review to each member of the site visiting team and ACCGC Managing Director at least one month prior to the scheduled site visit.

If this timeline cannot be met, it is the responsibility of the institution program coordinator to work with the ACCGC Managing Director and chair for the site visiting team in determining when the self-study report will be completed. A reasonable time extension may be granted, but if the delay is more than 6 months, it will be necessary to complete an extension application that includes a rationale and a $500.00 fee. The accreditation committee will decide on whether to grant the extension. Should the extension not be granted, all fees will be returned to the institution.

Site Visit

The site visiting team will meet with institution representatives over a 3-day period, with some meetings scheduled online the week prior to the on-site visit. Among other activities, team members will confer with institutional personnel to review plans, tour facilities, conduct interviews, observe classroom and laboratory activities, review documented support material, and meet with appropriate personnel including administrators, program faculty, program students, and the program advisory board. An exit meeting will be held with the faculty and administration at which time preliminary findings of the ACCGC visiting team are provided.

The ACCGC Managing Director will provide relevant information to the site visiting team no later than six weeks prior to the scheduled site visit regarding the travel reimbursement policy.

ACCGC must assure candid interviews, thus no institutional representatives outside of the intended interviewees can be present unless approved by the visiting team’s chair.
Site Visit Report

Within 30 days of the site visit, the team leader completes and sends a Site Visit Report to the ACCGC managing director and team members. The report should contain the front matter as presented in the program self-study, plus a summary of the findings from each ACCGC standard evaluated by the team.

The team members will review the report and respond to the team leader within 10 days. The team leader will then make two versions of the report: (1) a preliminary report version and (2) a final report version.

Fact-Checking Report. The preliminary report is shared with program personnel for fact checking review. This report will contain no evaluative comments, ratings or recommendations. The ACCGC Managing Director will forward the fact-checking report to the institutional representative for verification. The institutional representative should respond to the Managing Director within 2 weeks.

Final Report. The Site Visit Chair then finalizes a final Site Visit Report (including evaluative comments, ratings and recommendations) and submits it to the Managing Director for coordination with the chair of the Accreditation Committee.

Accreditation Term Lengths

Program accreditation may be recommended for either six years or two years and is activated on September 1 following the accreditation approval.

Six-year accreditation. For a six-year accreditation, an application for a re-accreditation review should be made at least 24 months prior to the expiration of the current accreditation term (at the end of the 4\textsuperscript{th} year). The site-visit will take place during the final year of an accredited term (within the 5\textsuperscript{th} year).

Two-year accreditation. A two-year accreditation period will be recommended if the Site Visit Team concludes that accreditation standards have largely been met, but an immediate response is required to ameliorate deficiencies. An approved two-year accreditation requires at least one team member to visit the institution a second time near the conclusion of the two-year accreditation time span, at which time the team will recommend either (a) accreditation expiration or (b) an extension of four more years to equal a total accreditation time of six years, pending approval by Accreditation Committee vote. The college/university is responsible for all financial costs associated with the follow-up visit.

If an institution is not granted accreditation, the institution may re-apply after a period of one calendar year from the date of notification.

Accreditation Committee Action

The final Site Visit Report is reviewed and voted upon by the ACCGC Accreditation Committee. The Accreditation Committee makes the recommendation to either (a) accredit or (b) to deny accreditation...
based on a review of this information. The ACCGC Managing Director provides the accrediting decision and final report to the institution’s representatives.

**Appeal Status**

The institutional representative may submit a written request for an appeal to the ACCGC Managing Director within 30 days of receipt of notification of the accreditation decision. The ACCGC Appeals Committee will review the institution's appeal and all accreditation documentation regarding the accreditation decision. The Appeals Committee may request further information from the institution and the site visiting team members to clarify specific appeal issues. The Appeals Committee members vote to uphold or reverse the decision of the Accreditation Committee. The ACCGC Managing Director will notify the institution’s representatives of the Appeals Committee decision. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

**New Accreditation Fees**

There is a $200.00 non-refundable application fee. If the application is approved, an $1800.00 fee (for bachelor’s degrees) or $1000.00 for associate degrees (or emphasis/concentration/minor) is required for the new accreditation process to begin. In addition to this fee, visiting team travel expenses must be covered by the host institution.

**Reaccreditation Fees**

There is no additional fee for a reaccreditation application in subsequent six-year cycles, however visit team travel costs are the responsibility of the institution program under review.

**Accreditation Review for Programs Outside the Continental USA**

Due to the potentially unfamiliar logistics of travel, international institutions are requested to coordinate, arrange and pay for hotel and food accommodations for the team.

**Annual Maintenance Fee**

Maintenance fees are due August 31st of each year.

- Associate degree: $1,200.00
- Bachelor’s degree: $2,000.00
- Sequence, minor, emphasis, or concentration within a bachelor’s degree: $1200.00

**Missing Payment**

Institutions not current in their annual fee will be put on probation for the first year after non-payment. Accreditation status will be withdrawn after the second year of non-payment.
**Accreditation Delay**

Institutions under accreditation review that are granted permission to delay the team visit to a subsequent year will be assessed a $500.00 annual administrative fee for each year of the delay.

**Multiple Programs at One Campus**

An institution wanting to accredit multiple degree programs in a single visit, will first be reviewed by the Accreditation Committee. If the programs are deemed significantly different in curricular content, faculty, and facilities, the institution will require a separate review and a separate team visit, and each program will be assessed full fees.

**Multiple Campus Systems**

ACCGC will accredit multiple campus systems offering a single graphic communications degree program. An independent reviewer will be appointed by the Accreditation Committee Chair to verify that the multiple campuses within the system all offer the same program. The reviewer fee is $500.00.

Multiple campus programs deemed appropriate for single accreditation will conduct a single self-study that will include appropriate information about each campus in the system. The visit team will be assigned one extra team member, comprising a four-member Site Visit Team. The team will visit the main campus as a group and conduct a full review. A fourth team member will then visit each campus in the system to conduct an audit, assuring that information in the self-study is accurate and complete.

The cost structure for a single accreditation for multiple campus programs is the same as a single campus system with one exception: the expenses incurred for the additional (4th) team member visit additional campus sites will be paid by the institution.
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

ACCGC has defined 15 standards that accredited collegiate graphic communications programs must meet or exceed. For each standard, the self-study involves collecting supportive evidence with an accompanying narrative.

1 Mission and Strategic Plan

Standard
The graphic communications program has a written mission statement that is aligned and supported by the department/school mission and institutional mission. The program has a strategic plan for year-to-year actions that assure the positive development of the program.

Evidence
Program mission
Departmental mission
College/school mission
Institutional mission
Program strategic plan with documented actions

Commentary
Describe how the missions align, including exclusive elements and mutually supportive areas of overlap.
Description of the short and long-term goals of the program, as well as planned and completed actions that assure the positive development of the program.

2 Governance/Administration

Standard
Administrative actions support the program. There is effective leadership of the graphic communications program.

Evidence
Administrative organization
Minutes of department/program meetings
Policies on program/department governance

Commentary
Commentary on program-level administration, as well as administrative input and support at the department and college levels.

3 Financial Support

Standard
The budget for graphic communications programs must be adequate to support program objectives and promote continuous program improvement.

Evidence
Fund allocation (from the institutional budget down to the program level)
External supplemental financial support (such as donations)

Commentary
Explanation of the balance of full-time vs adjunct faculty, norms in class sizes; condition and age of equipment and facilities, norms for faculty support for travel to workshops and conferences, and outside areas of support, like industry donations and partnerships.
4 Advisory Committee

Standard
A graphic communications advisory committee composed of a variety of industry professionals provides external guidance, validation, and advocacy for curricular content and program direction.

Evidence
Roster of industry advisory committee members (with diversity of specializations)
Bylaws (committee policies—member qualification requirements, member selection, and member responsibilities)
Meeting minutes (for the past 5 years)

Commentary
Describe the function of the advisory committee including frequency of meetings, areas of committee input, resulting actions over time, and the rationale for committee member composition.

5 Learning Outcomes Assessment

Standard
The following student learning outcomes are measured in a variety of ways, compiled annually for review, and the resulting data used to inform program improvements:

Bachelors and Associate Degree Student Learning Outcomes
1. Integrate design aesthetics, functionality, and relevancy into graphic communications products, optimizing user experience.
2. Impact production efficiency and product quality across a variety of media by applying knowledge of graphic communications materials, technologies, and practices.
3. Contribute to graphic communications project teams for design, production, and management.
4. Recognize and practice legal and ethical responsibilities concerning the creation, use, and distribution of graphic communications assets or products.
5. Communicate ideas through written, visual, and oral mediums to a wide range of audiences.
**Bachelors-only Degree Student Learning Outcomes**

6. Research and apply new information to solve graphic communications design, production, and management problems.

7. Apply tools and principles in graphic communications business development, and production management.

**Evidence**

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) aligned with ACCGC SLOs (if different)

Direct measures (with project and rubric examples)

Indirect measures of (a) graduating students, (b) employers, and (c) program alumni

**Commentary**

Provide commentary on the outcomes assessment system, its development, as well as examples of the use of measured outcomes to provide input to specific program changes.

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**6 Curriculum**

**Standard**

The program curriculum exhibits the pedagogy and curricular diversity required to meet student learning outcomes.

**Sources of evidence**

Program admission requirements

Program course plan (requirements for graduation with prerequisite structure, including any prescribed general education)

Course syllabi related to the major (not general education)

Course content (objectives) aligned to support each SLO

**Commentary**

Provide context with a history of how the curriculum evolved. Provide the rationale for any degree-specific general education requirements. Provide a rationale for the balance of course content to support SLOs across the curriculum, including any concentrations/specializations.
Explain specific ways in which the graphic communications program encourages learning experiences that address skills and knowledge pertaining to sustainability and social responsibility that are guided by institutionally led programming and addressed through the application of sound practices pertaining to materials and processes (examples include philanthropy, environment conservation, diversity, labor practices, or volunteerism).

### 7 Instructional Facilities

**Standard**
The instructional facilities are adequate to support the instruction required to meet student learning outcomes.

**Evidence**
Floor plan(s) of instructional facilities
Classroom technology
Inventory of laboratory equipment and software
Equipment and software maintenance policy
Lab supervision and safety policy

**Commentary**
Explanation of how lab equipment and instructional facilities support the course objectives and student learning outcomes.

### 8 Staff Support Services

**Standard**
The unit has support services to provide sufficient instructional assistance to meet student learning outcomes.

**Evidence**
Office staff (availability to program)
Technical support staff (availability to program)
Student assistants (availability to program)
External support services (availability to program)

**Commentary**
Explain the ways in which the program utilizes office staff, technical support staff, student assistants, and external support services.

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## 9 Internships/Practicums/Cooperative Study

**Standard**
Relevant practical experiences in the workplace, with or without academic credit, are supported. To meet compliance with the standard, internships/practicums/cooperative study are not required for graduation, however a program to support students in gaining relevant work experience should be in place.

**Evidence**
Data on annual student work experiences (credit and non-credit) related to the graphic communications industry.

Policies, procedures, and guidelines for internship/practicum/cooperative study.

**Commentary**
Explain how the program connects students with job opportunities, either for course credit or for non-credit experiences (part-time and summer jobs).

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## 10 Faculty

**Standard**
Faculty are academically and professionally qualified according to institutional norms, with evidence for meeting responsibilities and expectations.
Evidence
Tenured, tenure-track, instructional, and adjunct faculty (with specializations and course responsibilities)
Workload balance (contact hours, scholarship, service, advising)
Policies on selection and appointment of faculty
Faculty vitae
Faculty professional development activity

Commentary
Provide context for the balance of full-time and part-time faculty.
Explain the institutional norms for faculty qualifications and expectations for service and scholarship.
Explain the process for professional development support.

11 Faculty Evaluation

Standard
A system of evaluation provides faculty with performance feedback and actionable plans for improvement.

Evidence
Policies for tenure and promotion
Student teaching evaluation policies and instruments
Policies and practices for faculty evaluation

Commentary
Summarize the faculty evaluation methods and how feedback for improvement and progress toward promotion is provided to faculty.
12 Instruction and Evaluation

Standard
The graphic communications faculty are well prepared and teach well, exhibiting student-centered instructional practices.

Evidence
Course plans and support media (found in course materials on Learning Management System).
Policies, practices, and rationales regarding modes of instruction (face-to-face, hands-on laboratory, hybrid/blended, on-line).
Quizzes & exams examples
Major projects & grading rubrics examples

Commentary
Provide an overview and rationale for the modes of instruction used.

13 Student Records and Advising

Standard
A system for maintaining student records and advising students is established, in use, and effective. This includes logical transfer and articulation policies.

Evidence
Course offerings and enrollments by semester/quarter
The academic advising and recordkeeping system
Policies on student advisement schedules/requirements
Data on completion rates and time to graduation rates
Strategies/support services to assure retention, persistence, and completion rates
Student surveys/opinions on advising satisfaction
Commentary
Provide the context for how students are helped to plan the courses they take to graduate on time, including how prerequisites and course grades play a part.
Provide commentary on completion rates and time to graduation rates.

14 Graduate Placement and Follow-up

Standard
Initial placement assistance is provided. Graduate placement is tracked, both long-term and short-term. Regular follow-up studies of graduates are conducted for feedback on job titles, salaries, and satisfaction with the attainment of student learning outcomes.

Evidence
Career counseling services
Job opportunities through faculty contacts and job fairs
Graduating seniors and recent alums initial job placements (longer term job advancement and satisfaction)

Commentary
Provide commentary on programs that exist to help students prepare resumes, for interviewing, and for job searching; explain how the program tracks its graduates for job placement and advancement and its effectiveness.

15 Diversity and Inclusion

Standard
A culture of diversity is reflected in the student body of an institution, as well as among the faculty, staff, advisory board, administrators, trustees and other stakeholder groups.
Evidence
Current faculty and student diversity, retention, and graduation rates
Policies/trainings (that provide assurances for non-biased inclusion and the encouragement of gender and ethnic diversity)
Accommodation for the needs of those with disabilities

Commentary
Discuss the diversity and inclusion initiatives and diversity statistics in the student body and among institutional employees.