

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FORENSIC SCIENCES



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FORENSIC SCIENCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

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POLICIES & PROCEDURES

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FORENSIC SCIENCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mission

The mission of the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) is to maintain and enhance the quality of forensic science education through a formal evaluation and accreditation system for college-level academic programs that lead to a baccalaureate or graduate degree.

1.2 Purpose

The principal purposes of FEPAC are to develop and maintain standards for college and university forensic science programs and to implement an accreditation program.

1.3 History

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) was established in 1948 to promote education for and research in the forensic sciences; to encourage the study, improve the practice, elevate the standards, and advance the cause of the forensic sciences; to promote interdisciplinary communications; and to plan, organize, and administer meetings, reports, and other projects for the stimulation and advancement of these and related purposes.

An assessment of forensic sciences published in 1999 by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), entitled *Forensic Science: Review of Status and Needs*, described the educational and training needs of the forensic science community as “immense.” Among the recommendations contained in the report was the establishment of the following:

- National standards for education in forensic sciences,
- An independent, community-wide, consensus-building, standard-setting body such as a technical working group for education in forensic sciences, and
- An accreditation system for forensic science education programs.

The NIJ established a technical working group for education and training in forensic sciences (TWGED) in 2001 for the purpose of recommending sample curricular guidelines for educational programs in forensic sciences. The results of TWGED’s deliberations were delineated in a research report published in 2003, entitled *Education*

and Training in Forensic Sciences: A Guide for Forensic Science Laboratories, Educational Institutions, and Students.

Acknowledging the importance of an accreditation system for academic programs built on the foundation of TWGED, the AAFS in 2002 established an *ad hoc* committee, called Forensic Education Programs Accreditation Committee, to explore issues related to the development of such an accreditation system. In 2004, the committee became an official standing committee of the AAFS at which time its name was changed to Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC).

2.0 ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

2.1 Authority

FEPAC is responsible for, and has final authority over, the standards used for the evaluation of college and university forensic science programs for purposes of accreditation, judgments involving compliance with those standards, and accreditation decisions.

2.2 Composition

FEPAC is composed of eleven Commissioners. Five Commissioners are forensic science educators, five are forensic science practitioners, and one is a representative of the public. All Commissioners (except the public member) must be either a Member or Fellow of the AAFS. To serve as a forensic science educator, an individual must be a faculty member or an administrator at a college or university that offers a FEPAC-accredited forensic science program.¹ At least three of the forensic science practitioners must be members of the American Society of Crime Lab Directors (ASCLD). No two educators may be from the same institution, nor may any two practitioners be from the same agency.

The representative of the public may not be (1) an AAFS member; (2) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, either a forensic science program or the institution in which the forensic science program is located; (3) a member of any trade association or membership organization that is related to, affiliated with, or associated with FEPAC; or (4) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of any individual identified in (1), (2), or (3).

The FEPAC Chair may appoint committees to assist the Commission with its operational responsibilities, and these committees may include non-voting members to the Commission.

2.3 Selection of Commissioners

¹ Initially, the forensic science educators must be faculty members or administrators at a college or university that offers a program in forensic science. As FEPAC begins to accredit forensic science programs, however, the educators on the Commission may be replaced at the completion of their terms by forensic science educators who are affiliated with accredited programs.

FEPAC solicits nominations for positions on the Commission from its relevant constituencies, including forensic science programs, ASCLD, the Criminalistics Section of AAFS, regional forensic science organizations, forensic science certification bodies, and government agencies such as the NIJ, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the U.S. Department of Education. FEPAC reviews the nominations it receives and prepares from among the list of nominees a slate of individuals to serve on the Commission. FEPAC then recommends the slate to the President of AAFS, who appoints individuals to serve on the Commission after reviewing FEPAC's recommendation.

2.4 Chair of the Commission

The Chair of the Commission is elected annually by the members of the Commission and must be either a forensic science educator or a forensic science practitioner. The new Chair shall take office on the last day of the annual AAFS meeting. The Chair may be re-elected.

2.5 Terms of Office

The term of office for all Commissioners is three years, with appointments made on a staggered basis. After serving one term, a Commissioner may be reappointed to a second three-year term. However, no Commissioner may serve more than two consecutive three-year terms.

The ten individuals appointed by the President of AAFS in 2002 to be members of the Forensic Science Education Programs Committee will serve as the charter commissioners of FEPAC from February 2002 until February 2005. A public member will be appointed to the Commission by the President of AAFS during that period.

Beginning in February 2005 and continuing in February 2006 and February 2007, the President of AAFS will, after reviewing a slate recommended by FEPAC, appoint new Commissioners to replace the charter members of the Commission, according to the following schedule: In February 2005, one charter forensic science educator and one charter forensic science practitioner will be replaced. In February 2006 and again in February 2007, two of the charter forensic science educators and two of the charter forensic science practitioners will be replaced. All new appointees will serve three-year terms and may be reappointed to one additional term.

2.6 Vacancies

If a Commissioner resigns from the Commission before the expiration of his or her appointed term, or is otherwise unable to serve the full three-year term, the President of AAFS will, upon the recommendation of FEPAC, appoint an individual to serve the remainder of that term. At the appropriate time, if that individual is eligible, nominated, and recommended by the Commission, he or she may be appointed to a regular term by the President of AAFS.

2.7 Meetings

The Commission meets annually, usually in conjunction with the AAFS Annual Meeting, and at any special meetings during the year that may be necessary to conduct the business of the Commission. The Chair gives at least 60 days' written notice to Commissioners of the time and place of all meetings.

2.8 Attendance

All Commissioners are expected to attend all Commission meetings. A Commissioner who fails to attend two consecutive meetings without the approval of the Chair will be considered to have resigned from the Commission.

2.9 Quorum

A quorum consists of eight Commissioners. There must be a quorum present for all votes on accreditation matters, including the establishment of standards and the actual accreditation decisions regarding programs. No proxy voting is permitted.

2.10 Commissioner Orientation and Training

All individuals appointed to serve as Commissioners shall receive orientation and successfully complete training on the FEPAC standards, policies, and procedures prior to beginning their first term on the Commission. New commissioners shall undergo on-site evaluator training. All Commissioners shall also receive periodic training on any updates to the standards, policies, and procedures.

2.11 Administrative Support

The Director of Accreditation shall coordinate the administrative support for the Commission and work with FEPAC and AAFS to ensure that FEPAC has adequate administrative staff and financial resources to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. As agreed upon by FEPAC and AAFS, some of the administrative staff may be shared between FEPAC and AAFS.

The Chair of the Commission, along with the AAFS leadership and staff, may appoint the Director of Accreditation. The Director of Accreditation is not a Commissioner.

2.12 Fiscal Policies

FEPAC will adhere to the fiscal policies of the AAFS.

FEPAC, with the approval of the AAFS Board of Directors, sets the fee structure for its accreditation activities and may apply for and accept grants and other monies to further its accreditation activities.

AAFS serves as the repository for all FEPAC accreditation monies, including all dues and fees collected from accredited programs and those programs applying to FEPAC for accreditation, as well as any grants awarded to FEPAC. However, all monies so collected by AAFS must be earmarked and used solely for FEPAC's activities. FEPAC prepares an annual operating budget and submits the budget to AAFS for approval. All expenditures must stay within the AAFS-approved budget.

3.0 ACCREDITATION PROCESS

3.1 Eligibility

To be eligible for FEPAC accreditation or reaccreditation, a forensic science program must:

- (1) Be housed in a regionally accredited college or university, and
- (2) Offer at least a bachelor's degree either in forensic science or in a natural science with a concentration in forensic science.

In addition, a program seeking initial accreditation with FEPAC must have graduated at least two classes before applying for accreditation. However, a program seeking provisional accreditation with FEPAC does not have to meet this requirement.

3.2 Application

A forensic science program that wishes to obtain FEPAC accreditation or provisional accreditation must submit an application form with supporting documentation and pay the application fee. The application must be signed by the chief executive officer of the institution housing the forensic science program or by an institutional administrator authorized to act on behalf of the chief executive officer on matters related to accreditation.

An application for accreditation or provisional accreditation may be submitted at any time. After receiving a program's application and verifying that it is complete, a FEPAC representative contacts the program director to discuss a timeline for submission of the program's self-study, the on-site visit, and subsequent review and decision by the Commission.

The program shall be evaluated for accreditation under the standards in place on the date its application is submitted to FEPAC.

3.3 Self-Study

A forensic science program that seeks FEPAC provisional accreditation, initial accreditation, or reaccreditation must conduct an in-depth self-study of its compliance with FEPAC's accreditation standards. The self-study should provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It should examine all aspects of the educational program, including the curriculum and the program's success with respect to student achievement, as well as the faculty, academic and student support services, resources, facilities, administration, etc.

The self-study should involve all of the program's relevant constituencies, e.g., administrators, faculty members, field supervisors, practicum coordinators, students,

and graduates. Other constituencies may also play a role, e.g., program advisory committees, employers of graduates, forensic science practitioners, etc.

Guidance on how to prepare a self-study report is provided in section 4.6 of this manual.

3.4 Site Visit

A forensic science program that seeks provisional accreditation, initial accreditation, or reaccreditation must host a site visit. The purpose of the site visit is to verify the contents of the program's self-study and to determine if the program complies with FEPAC's standards.

Site visits are at least two days in length. The actual length of the visit will be determined by FEPAC after taking into account the number and/or complexity of the program(s) to be evaluated.

The on-site team consists of at least two members, one of whom is a forensic science educator and the other a forensic science practitioner. Normally, the forensic science educator serves as chair of the team. Additional members may be appointed to the team if warranted by the number and/or complexity of the program(s) to be evaluated.

To be an on-site evaluator, an individual must be an AAFS Member or Fellow and selected by the commission. In addition, the forensic science educator on the team must be a full-time faculty member or an administrator at a college or university that offers a FEPAC-accredited forensic science program.² The forensic science practitioner on the team must be employed in the field of forensic science, either as a scientist who is a member of ASCLD or in some equivalent capacity within the profession of forensic science.

All individuals selected to be on-site evaluators receive training on the FEPAC standards, policies, and process prior to serving on a team. All evaluators also receive periodic retraining and updating on the standards, policies, and procedures.

No person may serve on an on-site team evaluating a forensic science program if that individual is employed by, or a graduate of, the institution that houses the forensic science program. All individuals who serve on teams have a responsibility both to notify FEPAC of any conflict of interest, or perception of a conflict, that might exist with respect to a program being reviewed and to decline to serve on any team that visits the program if such a conflict exists.

FEPAC informs a program at least two months in advance of a site visit of the evaluators it proposes to use as the on-site team. The program has the right to request that a team member be replaced if the program believes that person has a conflict of interest, or a perceived conflict of interest, in reviewing the program. FEPAC will review

² Initially, the forensic science educator on the team must be a faculty member or an administrator at a college or university that offers a program in forensic science. After FEPAC has accredited at least five programs, the educator on the team will normally be affiliated with an accredited program.

the program's request and appoint another person to serve on the team if FEPAC determines that a real or perceived conflict of interest exists.

During the site visit, team members typically interview faculty, administrators, students, graduates, field supervisors, practicum directors, and employers of graduates. They also review program records and supporting documentation and tour the facilities. In addition, they may observe some classes.

At the conclusion of the site visit, the team provides an oral summary of its findings to the responsible administrator of the institution, the program director, and any other individuals the administrator or program director may wish to have present. The team does not inform the program regarding its recommendation to the Commission for accreditation. Rather, the team limits its oral report to its observations regarding the program's compliance with the FEPAC standards.

3.5 Team Report

No later than 10 calendar days after the conclusion of the site visit, the team forwards its written report of the visit to FEPAC. The report addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the program, its compliance with each of the FEPAC accreditation standards, and its success with respect to student achievement.

3.6 Program response

After administrative review of the team report, FEPAC forwards the report to the program and allows the program 30 calendar days to respond in writing to the report.

3.7 Commission Decision

Prior to making an accreditation decision regarding a forensic science program, the Commission conducts its own in-depth analysis of the program's compliance with the FEPAC accreditation standards. At a minimum, this analysis consists of a review of the program's self-study, the report of the on-site evaluation team, the program's response to the team report, and the record of any student complaints about the program that may be available to FEPAC.

In reaching its decision, the Commission also evaluates whether a program maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the degrees or certificates awarded, is successful in achieving its stated objectives, and maintains degree and certificate requirements that conform to commonly accepted standards.

3.8 Accreditation Categories

In making its accrediting decisions, the Commission may assign any of the following accreditation categories to a program:

- *Full Accreditation*, signifying that the program meets all FEPAC standards. This status may be awarded to programs seeking either initial or renewal of accreditation.

- *Conditional Accreditation*, signifying that the Commission has identified some weakness(es) in the program that the program must correct within a time frame specified by the Commission. The time frame may not exceed two years. This status may be assigned to programs seeking initial accreditation or to currently accredited programs.
- *Provisional Accreditation*, signifying that the Commission has reviewed the program and determined that it meets all the standards except that it has not yet graduated two classes. The program may later be awarded accreditation after an evaluation of a formal report documenting compliance with all the standards.
- *Probation*, signifying that the Commission has determined that an accredited program fails to meet one or more of the standards and must take corrective action to come into compliance with the standard(s) within a time frame specified by the Commission. The time frame may not exceed two years.
- *Denial of Accreditation*, signifying that the Commission has determined that the program does not meet the standards. This status may be assigned only to programs seeking initial accreditation.
- *Withdrawal of Accreditation*, signifying that the Commission has determined that the program does not meet the standards. This status may be assigned only to accredited programs that are seeking renewal of accreditation or that have been determined, as the result of a complaint, the review of an annual report, or some other action during a period of accreditation, to be in noncompliance with the standards.

3.9 Renewal of Accreditation

A program may be granted accreditation for a term not to exceed five years.

A program seeking renewal of accreditation must submit a new self-study and host another site visit within six months prior to the expiration of the previously granted period of accreditation.

3.10 Enforcement of Standards

If at any time FEPAC's review of a program under any FEPAC standard indicates that the program is not in compliance with that standard, FEPAC either immediately initiates adverse action against the program or requires the program to take appropriate action to bring itself into compliance with FEPAC's standards within a time period that does not exceed 24 months. If the program does not bring itself into compliance within the specified period, FEPAC initiates immediate adverse action unless it determines that the period for achieving compliance should be extended for good cause.

3.11 Annual Reports

As a condition of continued accreditation, each accredited forensic science program must submit an annual report to FEPAC, using an annual report form provided by FEPAC. If a program fails to submit the required annual report on time, the Commission will place the program on conditional accreditation.

FEPAC reviews each program's annual report and takes follow-up action, as appropriate, if any information in the report calls into question the ability of the program to meet the FEPAC accreditation standards. Such action may include, but is not limited to, requesting an additional report from the program, conducting a special site visit to the program, placing the program on probation, or withdrawing the program's accreditation.

3.12 Substantive Change

FEPAC requires any accredited program to obtain FEPAC's approval of any substantive change the program undergoes before FEPAC includes the change in the scope of accreditation it previously granted to the program.

FEPAC defines substantive change to include at least the following types of change:

- (1) Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution housing the program.
- (2) Any change in the legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution housing the program.
- (3) The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, in either content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when FEPAC last evaluated the program.
- (4) The addition of courses or programs at a degree or credential level above that which is included in the program's current accreditation.
- (5) A substantial change in the number of credit hours required for successful completion of a program.

Upon receipt from a program of a request for approval of a substantive change, FEPAC reviews the request and takes whatever action it deems appropriate. Such action may include approving the change, requesting further information from the program, conducting a site visit, or denying the program's request to have the change included in its scope of accreditation.

3.13 Public Disclosure

If a program elects to make a public disclosure of its accreditation status with FEPAC, the program must disclose that status accurately, including the specific academic or instructional programs covered by that status and the name, address, and telephone number of FEPAC.

If an accredited program releases incorrect or misleading information about its accreditation status with FEPAC, the contents of reports of on-site reviews of the program by FEPAC, or FEPAC's accrediting actions with respect to the program, FEPAC will direct the program to provide for the public correction of such information. If the program fails to do so, FEPAC will take appropriate action, which may include placing the program on probation or withdrawing its accreditation. FEPAC will also provide for the public correction of the information itself.

4.0 OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

4.1 Appeal Procedure

If FEPAC decides to deny accreditation to a program, or to withdraw the accreditation of an accredited program, the program has the right to appeal that decision. Since FEPAC does not consider a decision to place a program on probation to be an adverse action, such an action may not be appealed.

If a program wishes to appeal a FEPAC decision to deny or withdraw accreditation, the program must submit a letter of intent, signed by the appropriate administrator of the institution, to FEPAC within 15 calendar days of receipt of the FEPAC decision. The program has an additional 30 calendar days to submit the written grounds for its appeal, together with supporting documentation and the fee for the appeal.

A program may appeal the FEPAC decision only on the grounds that FEPAC's decision was arbitrary, capricious, and/or not supported by the evidence available to the Commission when it made its decision or that FEPAC did not follow its own procedures in reaching the decision.

If a program fails to submit either a letter of intent to appeal or written grounds for an appeal within the specified time frames, the appeal will be dismissed and the original FEPAC decision becomes final.

Once a letter of intent to appeal a decision is received by FEPAC, the Chair of the Commission appoints a three-person Appeal Board, including a Chair. The members of the Appeal Board are selected from forensic science educators and practitioners who have experience with the FEPAC accreditation process but were not involved in any way in the original decision. They may include current and former on-site evaluators, as well as former Commissioners.

After the program submits its written grounds for the appeal, the Chair of the Appeal Board sets a time and place for the appeal hearing and arranges for each member of the Appeal Board to be provided with a copy of the program's self-study, the team report, the program's response to the team report, and any other written documents on which the FEPAC decision was based, together with FEPAC's decision letter.

At the appeal hearing, representatives of the program have an opportunity to make a presentation and explain the basis for the appeal. The program has the right to be represented by legal counsel during the hearing.

After the program representatives' presentation, members of the Appeal Board have the right to ask questions of the program representatives and the program's legal counsel (if present). At the conclusion of the hearing, the Appeal Board convenes in closed session, without representatives of the program present, to reach a decision. The Appeal Board may either uphold the original FEPAC decision or remand the case to the Commission for further consideration. Both the program and the Commission are informed in writing of the Appeal Board's decision within 30 calendar days of the hearing.

If the Appeal Board upholds the original FEPAC decision, the decision becomes final on the date of the letter to the program informing it of the Appeal Board's decision. If the Appeal Board remands the case to the Commission for further consideration, the Commission takes the matter up at its next meeting, considering the action of the Appeal Board and the reasons for the remand. The Commission may make a final determination at that meeting or take other action as appropriate, based on the circumstances, before reaching a final determination. Within 30 calendar days of making its final determination, the Commission notifies the program in writing of its decision.

If a program files an appeal, any accreditation status it held prior to the original FEPAC decision remains in effect until the appeal is heard and a final decision rendered.

4.2 Complaints

It is FEPAC policy to review in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives against an accredited program that is related to FEPAC's standards or procedures and to take follow-up action, as appropriate, including enforcement action, if necessary, based on the results of its review. It is also FEPAC policy to review in a timely, fair, and equitable manner, and apply unbiased judgment to, any complaints against itself and to take follow-up action, as appropriate, based on the results of its review.

Complaints against Accredited Programs

FEPAC considers all written, signed complaints it receives against accredited programs. Within 15 calendar days of receipt of such a complaint, FEPAC sends a letter to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the complaint procedures. Also within 15 calendar days of receipt of the complaint, FEPAC forwards a copy of the complaint to the program and requests that the program submit a written response to FEPAC within 30 calendar days of the program's receipt of the complaint.

When FEPAC receives the program's response, it conducts its own investigation of the complaint to determine if the program has violated any of FEPAC's standards or policies. FEPAC makes every effort to complete its investigation as expeditiously as

possible, and normally the investigation is completed within 30 calendar days. However, in certain circumstances more time may be necessary.

When FEPAC has completed its investigation, it notifies both the program and the complainant in writing of the results. If FEPAC determines that the program is not in compliance with its standards or policies, FEPAC takes appropriate action, which may include requesting a follow-up report from the program documenting that corrective action has been taken, conducting a site visit, placing the program on either accreditation with stipulations or probation, or taking steps to withdraw the program's accreditation.

If FEPAC receives an anonymous complaint about a program, or an oral complaint that the complainant refuses to put into writing, FEPAC takes whatever action it deems appropriate in light of the seriousness of the complaint.

Complaints against FEPAC

FEPAC shall consider all substantive, written, signed complaints it receives against the Commission or its administrative staff. Within 15 calendar days of receipt of such a complaint, the Chair of the Commission sends a letter to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the complaint procedures. Also, within 15 days, the Chair will, if necessary, appoint a three-person panel of non-FEPAC members to investigate and properly resolve the complaint. Members of the panel are selected from forensic science educators and practitioners who have experience with the accreditation process but were not involved in any aspect of the complaint. They may include current and former on-site evaluators, as well as former Commissioners. The panel normally has 30 calendar days to complete its investigation of the complaint, although under certain circumstances it may take more than 30 days to complete the investigation. When the investigation is completed, the panel reports its findings in writing to the complainant and the Commission. If the panel determines that there is merit to the complaint, it will recommend that the Commission take appropriate action. The Commission considers the panel's recommendations at its next regularly scheduled meeting or, if such a meeting is not scheduled to take place within the next two months, during a conference call within two months of the Commission's receipt of the panel's recommendation. The Commission informs both the complainant and the panel of all actions it has taken or plans to take based on the panel's recommendation.

If FEPAC receives an anonymous complaint about the Commission or its administrative staff, the Chair takes whatever action he or she deems appropriate in light of the seriousness of the complaint.

4.3 Confidentiality

All individuals participating in the FEPAC accreditation process, including but not limited to on-site evaluators, Commissioners, consultants, FEPAC staff members, and anyone serving as a FEPAC representative must sign a confidentiality agreement. These individuals are prohibited from discussing any information they learn about a program

through the accrediting process with anyone other than on-site evaluators, Commissioners, FEPAC staff, and program representatives.

4.4 Conflict of Interest

All individuals participating in the FEPAC accreditation process, including but not limited to on-site evaluators, Commissioners, consultants, FEPAC staff members, and anyone serving as a FEPAC representative, have an obligation to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest in carrying out their accrediting responsibilities. A conflict of interest is defined as any relationship with a FEPAC-accredited program, or a program that is seeking FEPAC accreditation, that could interfere with the ability of the individual to exercise objectivity in the accreditation process. A perceived conflict of interest is any such relationship that could be perceived as interfering with the individual's ability to exercise objectivity. Circumstances that may create a real or perceived conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, situations in which an individual:

- Is employed by the institution that houses the program that is seeking, or already holds, FEPAC accreditation, or has a close relative (spouse, parent, child, or sibling) who is so employed,
- Is, or has been, a consultant to the program or the institution that houses the program, or has a close relative who is, or has been, such a consultant,
- Has a monetary or personal interest in the outcome of the accreditation decision regarding the program,
- Is a graduate of the institution that houses the program, or
- Has a close personal relationship with an individual or individuals involved with the institution or program.

An on-site evaluator must not accept appointment to a team evaluating a program if there is a real or perceived conflict of interest with that person's participation in the accreditation process. When accepting appointment to a team, an on-site evaluator must sign a conflict-of-interest statement attesting to the fact that he or she has no real or perceived conflict of interest with the program being reviewed.

A Commissioner who has a real or perceived conflict of interest with a program being reviewed must refrain from participating in the discussion and vote on that program, and the minutes of the Commission meeting must clearly reflect that the individual was recused from the vote. Once a year, all Commissioners must sign a conflict-of-interest statement identifying all programs for which they might have a real or perceived conflict of interest. The Chair of the Commission reminds Commissioners at the beginning of each meeting of their responsibilities to avoid all real and perceived conflicts of interest.

4.5 Due Process

FEPAC allows a program a reasonable period of time to comply with any requests it makes of the program to provide FEPAC with information and documents.

FEPAC notifies a program in writing of any adverse action to deny or withdraw accreditation or an action to place the program on probation. The notice describes the basis for the action.

FEPAC permits a program the opportunity to appeal an adverse action to deny or withdraw accreditation and the right to be represented by counsel during that appeal. Notice of the right to appeal and a copy of the appeal procedure are included with the letter FEPAC sends to the program notifying it of FEPAC's decision to deny or withdraw accreditation. Any accreditation status the program had prior to the Commission's decision to deny or withdraw accreditation remains in effect until the appeal process is complete.

FEPAC notifies the program in writing of the result of its appeal and the basis for that result.

4.6 Preparing a Self-Study Report

The self-study report serves as a major source of information for FEPAC about the program seeking accreditation. One of the purposes of the visit conducted by the FEPAC evaluation team is to verify the contents of the program's self-study.

The self-study report should be clear and concise, and written in a manner that allows individuals unfamiliar with the program to develop a clear understanding of the environment in which the program operates, the nature of the learning experiences the program provides students, and the program's assessment of its effectiveness in educating students.

The program's self-study report follows the structure of FEPAC's standards, i.e., for each standard, the program provides a brief narrative describing how it believes it complies with the standard. The specific format for the self-study report may be found in Section 5.2.

To minimize the burden on programs in preparing a self-study report, complete with all the supporting materials necessary to document the program's compliance with FEPAC's standards, FEPAC encourages programs to use existing institutional or departmental data, materials, reports, studies, and policies, etc., as documentation. Programs may also find it helpful to use, or simply update, documents that were prepared in conjunction with the institution's most recent review for reaccreditation.

4.7 Information to be Provided to the U.S. Department of Education

When FEPAC is granted recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education, it will submit the following information to the Department:

- (1) A copy of any annual report FEPAC prepares.

- (2) A copy, updated annually, of FEPAC's directory of programs.
- (3) A summary of FEPAC's major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if requested by the Secretary to carry out the Secretary's responsibilities related to the recognition of accrediting agencies.
- (4) Any proposed change in FEPAC's policies, procedures, or accreditation standards that might alter either its scope of recognition or its compliance with the Criteria for Recognition.
- (5) The name of any FEPAC-accredited program, or institution housing such a program, that FEPAC has reason to believe is failing to meet its program responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended, or is engaged in fraud or abuse, along with FEPAC's reasons for concern about the program or institution.
- (6) If the Secretary requests, information that may bear upon the ability of an institution housing a FEPAC-accredited program to comply with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution or the FEPAC-accredited program to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.

4.8 Notification of Accrediting Decisions

Within 30 days of making its accrediting decisions, FEPAC provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public:

- (1) A decision to award initial or provisional accreditation to a program.
- (2) A decision to renew a program's accreditation.
- (3) A decision to place a program on probation.
- (4) A final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate the accreditation of a program.

For all decisions listed under (3) and (4), FEPAC provides written notice to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies at the same time it notifies the program and makes the information available to the public on its web site within 24 hours of its notice to the program.

Also for all decisions listed under (3) and (4), FEPAC makes available to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the public upon request, no later than 60 days after the decision, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for FEPAC's decision and the comments, if any, that the affected program may wish to make with regard to that decision.

Finally, FEPAC notifies the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and, upon request, the public if an accredited program—

- (1) Decides to withdraw voluntarily from accreditation, within 30 days of receiving notification from the program that it is withdrawing voluntarily from accreditation; or
- (2) Lets its accreditation lapse, within 30 days of the date on which accreditation lapses.

4.9 Records Maintenance

FEPAC maintains complete, accurate, and secure records of its last two full accreditation reviews of each program, including on-site evaluation team reports, the program=s responses to on-site reports, any periodic review reports that FEPAC may require of accredited programs, any reports of special reviews that FEPAC may conduct between regular reviews, and a copy of the program=s most recent self-study. FEPAC also maintains complete, accurate, and secure records of all its decisions regarding the accreditation of any program, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions.

4.10 Regard for Decisions of States and Other Accrediting Agencies

FEPAC does not accredit a forensic science program unless the institution housing the program is legally authorized under applicable State law to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level and to award degrees.

FEPAC does not normally grant initial or renewed accreditation to a forensic science program if FEPAC has reasonable cause to believe that the institution housing the program is the subject of any of the following:

- (1) A pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution=s legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the State.
- (2) A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or preaccreditation.
- (3) A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution=s accreditation or preaccreditation.
- (4) Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.

Should FEPAC grant accreditation to a program housed in an institution that meets any condition described in (1) through (4), FEPAC will provide the Secretary, within 30 days

of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards, why the action of the other body does not preclude FEPAC's grant of accreditation.

If FEPAC learns that an institution that houses a program it accredits is the subject of an adverse action by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized agency, FEPAC will take prompt action to review its accreditation of the program to determine if it should also take adverse action or place the program on probation.

Finally, FEPAC will, upon request, share with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation status of any program and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited program.

4.11 Review of Standards

It is FEPAC policy to conduct ongoing and comprehensive reviews of its accreditation standards to verify that they are adequate to evaluate educational quality and relevant to the educational and training needs of students seeking a career in forensic science. FEPAC uses a combination of annual reviews, longer-term reviews, and special reviews to accomplish this task. The various reviews are described below:

Annual Reviews

1. Formal Review of the Standards

Once a year, the Commission reviews each of the standards to determine if it is adequate to evaluate the quality of forensic science programs. The implications of changes in the field of forensic science and the practices of FEPAC-accredited programs on the standards are routinely considered during these formal reviews, as are changes designed either to improve program quality or to update the language of the standards. Also considered are the results of the other FEPAC review activities (discussed below) and any other activities FEPAC routinely conducts during the year that provide input about the effectiveness of the standards. The latter activities typically include discussions with FEPAC-accredited programs during the annual AAFS meeting and during various workshops FEPAC conducts for its programs, reviews of any complaints received during the year that suggest problems with the standards, etc. If problems are found with any of the standards during this formal review, proposals for new or revised standards are developed, sent out for comment to the relevant constituencies, and voted on at a subsequent Commission meeting after the Commission analyzes the comments received.

Through this formal review of individual standards that takes place annually, the Commission adds new standards, revises existing ones, and eliminates those that it determines are outdated or no longer appropriate to the assessment of program quality.

2. Informal Reviews of the Standards After Each Commission Meeting

In addition to the formal, structured review of specific standards that was described in the previous section and that takes place annually during a Commission meeting, there is a less formal *ad hoc* review of the standards by Commissioners that takes place at the end of each Commission meeting. The purpose of these reviews is to determine, based on the application of the standards to the specific programs the Commission considered during its meeting, if there are problems with any of the standards that require further investigation and possible modification.

Any proposals for changes to the standards that result from this informal review process are subject to the usual FEPAC procedures for revisions to the standards (described in the preceding section).

3. Reviews of the Standards by Programs and On-site Evaluators

After each site visit, FEPAC surveys programs about their perceptions of the adequacy and relevance of the standards. FEPAC schedules this activity immediately after each site visit because it recognizes that programs that have recently prepared a self-study and undergone an on-site review have a particularly keen insight into the relevance of the standards, the effectiveness of their application during the self-study and site visit, etc., and thus can provide useful information for the Commission to consider during its structured review of the standards.

In a similar fashion, FEPAC surveys on-site evaluators after each site visit to gain any insights they might have about the standards, their effectiveness in evaluating educational quality, their relevance to the education and training needs of students, etc.

The information obtained from both of these activities is provided to the Commission for use during the Commission's annual structured review of the standards.

4. Reviews of Student Outcomes

An important measure of the effectiveness of the FEPAC standards, both individually and as a whole, is the achievement of students. Two tools FEPAC uses to measure student outcomes are the retention rate and the job placement rate of students who are enrolled in a FEPAC-accredited program, as reported by programs on their Annual Report form.

The information obtained from this activity is provided to the Commission for use during the Commission's annual structured review of the standards.

Longer-term Reviews

1. Formal Review of the Standards

Every five years, the Commission conducts longer-term reviews of the standards, the primary purpose of which is to determine if the current standards, when viewed as a whole and individually, are adequate to evaluate the quality of forensic education programs and relevant to the education and training needs of students.

Usually, when a standard is being reviewed as part of this process, there is a general discussion at the outset by members of the Commission and FEPAC's relevant constituencies about what issues are important to consider in evaluating quality in that area. This is followed by a detailed examination of the standards to determine if they adequately address all of the issues identified. If they do not, then proposals are developed to modify or, if necessary, replace one or more standards or add additional standards.

2. Reviews of the Criteria by Institutions and Other Constituencies

Every five years, FEPAC also conducts a comprehensive survey of accredited programs regarding FEPAC standards, policies, and procedures. Following a review of the results of the survey, the Commission may implement changes to ensure that its standards, both individually and as a whole, continue to be adequate to measure program quality and effectiveness and relevant to the educational needs of students.

In a similar fashion, every five years FEPAC surveys other relevant constituencies such as federal and state agencies, employers of graduates of FEPAC-accredited programs, other accrediting agencies, etc., regarding FEPAC standards, policies, and procedures.

3. Reviews of Special Issues by Task Forces and Other Groups

Periodically, the Commission holds meetings with relevant constituencies to address special issues. After a general discussion of the issues, participants review the relevant FEPAC standards and assess their viability as measures of quality related to the issue.

Special Reviews

At least every five years, the Commission participates in additional studies that compare and analyze the FEPAC standards. The topics for these studies vary, depending on the specific issues of interest at the time, but generally they provide both a comparison of FEPAC standards with those of other bodies (e.g., other specialized accrediting agencies) and an analysis to determine the quality, validity, and consistency of the standards.

4.12 Revision of Standards

If FEPAC determines, at any point during its systematic program of review of its standards, or at any other time, that it needs to make changes to its standards, it initiates action within 12 months to make the changes, and it completes that action within a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to its standards,

FEPAC provides notice to all of its relevant constituencies, and other parties who have made their interest known to FEPAC, of the changes it proposes to make, gives its constituencies and other interested parties adequate opportunity to comment on the proposed changes, and takes into account any comments on the proposed changes submitted timely by the relevant constituencies and by other interested parties. Any substantive changes to the standards must be approved by the Board of Directors of the AAFS before implementation.

4.13 Miscellaneous Policies and Procedures

FEPAC maintains and makes available to the public, upon request, written materials describing—

- (1) Each type of accreditation it grants.
- (2) The procedures that programs must follow in applying for accreditation.
- (3) The standards and procedures it uses to determine whether to grant, reaffirm, reinstate, restrict, deny, revoke, terminate, or take any other action related to each type of accreditation it grants.
- (4) The programs that FEPAC currently accredits and, for each program, the year FEPAC will next review or reconsider it for accreditation.
- (5) The names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of the Commission and FEPAC's principal administrative staff.

Whenever FEPAC is considering a program for accreditation, FEPAC provides an opportunity for third-party comment concerning the program's qualifications for accreditation. FEPAC provides this opportunity by posting notice on its web site and also by sending written notice to its principal constituencies.

5.0 FORMS

5.1 Application for Accreditation

5.1.1 Application for Initial Accreditation

5.1.2 Application for Reaccreditation

5.2 Self-Study Report

5.3 Annual Report

5.4 Application for Approval of a Substantive Change

- 5.5 Application to be an On-Site Evaluator**
- 5.6 On-site Evaluator Conflict-of-Interest Form**
- 5.7 Commissioner Conflict-of-Interest Form**
- 5.8 Confidentiality Agreement**
- 5.9 Records Destruction Form**
- 5.11 On-Site Evaluator Survey**
- 5.12 Program Post On-Site Visit Survey**

- 6.0 DUES AND FEES**
(dues and fees to be determined later)

*Adopted by FEPAC May 16, 2003.
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