



Policy Title:	FEPAC Accreditation Process Policy
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Related Commission Document:	FEPAC Application Forms FEPAC Self-Study Forms
References:	FEPAC Accreditation Standards FEPAC Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Policy FEPAC Notification of Change Policy FEPAC Commission Actions Policy FEPAC Fees and Dues Policy FEPAC Annual Reporting and Performance Disclosure Policy FEPAC Accreditation Timeline
Responsible Official:	Operations, Policy and Procedure Sub-Committee

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Policy Summary

This policy outlines the procedures for seeking FEPAC accreditation.

STEP 1: APPLICATION

A forensic science program seeking FEPAC accreditation shall begin the process by submitting an application, supporting documentation, and required fees (see FEPAC *Fees and Dues* Policy) to the Office of the Accreditation & Outreach Manager (AOM). The application must be signed by the chief executive officer of the institution housing the forensic science department/program or by an institutional administrator authorized to act on behalf of the chief executive officer on matters related to accreditation. The application must include the names and contact information of all individuals to be notified of FEPAC decisions regarding the program.

ELIGIBILITY

Only the concentrations listed in FEPAC *Accreditation Standard* 3.1 are eligible for FEPAC accreditation. Concentrations offered as independent certificate programs, where students with degrees from other institutions earn a certificate by completing prescribed courses, are not eligible for accreditation. The content of a certificate program, when offered in conjunction with an existing B.S. in a natural science (e.g., chemistry, biology), or digital forensic science, could result in the combination (of the certificate content plus the degree content) being accredited as a program. The “certificate” program offered as a stand-alone could not be accredited. Institutions in this situation are required to ensure their advertisement and public communications explain this distinction.

SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION (See FEPAC *Application Forms*)

New Applications and Accreditation Renewal Applications

An application and associated fees (see FEPAC *Fees and Dues* Policy) for accreditation must be submitted during the open application period to be considered for the current accreditation cycle (see FEPAC *Accreditation Timeline* document).

- One application for all concentrations within the same degree level is acceptable if submitted during the same annual accreditation cycle.
- A program that chooses to seek accreditation for multiple concentrations in different cycle years will be required to submit separate applications.
- If an institution has more than one concentration, and the concentrations are in different departments with different program directors, then each will be required to submit a separate application.
- Separate applications are required for undergraduate and graduate programs (see FEPAC *Application Forms*).
- **Renewal of Accreditation** - A program may be granted accreditation for a term not to exceed five (5) years. A program seeking renewal of accreditation must apply to renew accreditation, submit a new self-study, and host another site visit within six (6) months prior to the expiration of the previously granted period of accreditation.

Applications to Add Concentration(s)

Programs seeking to add a different degree level (e.g., adding a Master of Science to a currently accredited Bachelor of Science) to a currently accredited program must use the New Application process described above. However, an alternate application process is available for programs seeking to add a new concentration to an existing accredited degree program between accreditation cycles. In these instances, FEPAC Form (5.1.3) and the associated application fees (see FEPAC *Fees and Dues Policy*) shall be submitted at any time during the year.

The AOM performs a cursory review of the application form to verify completeness and may request updates and supplemental materials from the Program. Once complete, the AOM refers the application to the Commission for evaluation. Depending on the scope and complexity of the proposed addition, FEPAC may, at its discretion issue one of the following decisions:

1. **Approval (Unconditional or Conditional)** - The new concentration is approved without the need for an additional site visit and is included within the existing accreditation. The program must include the new concentration in the program's next Annual Report (see FEPAC *Annual Reporting and Performance Disclosure Policy* and FEPAC *Fees and Dues Policy*);
2. **Site Visit Required** - An additional site visit is required to properly evaluate the new concentration. The program is required to resubmit the new concentration during the standard application period (see *New Applications and Accreditation Renewal Applications* section above). Note that the timing of notification requiring processing as a new application has defined date requirements (see FEPAC *Accreditation Timeline* document).
3. **Denial** – The application is denied. The program is required to submit the new concentration during the standard application period (see *New Applications and Accreditation Renewal Applications* section above). Note that the timing of notification requiring processing as a new application has defined date requirements.

Advertising Restriction: Until the Commission has officially reviewed and accredited the new concentration, the program must clearly distinguish in its publicity and advertising that the new concentration is **not** FEPAC accredited.

RECEIPT OF APPLICATION

After receiving a program's application, the AOM performs an administrative review of the application form to verify form completeness. The AOM may contact the Program to request necessary updates and/or provide supplemental materials. Once the application is finalized, the AOM refers the application to the Commission for an eligibility determination.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Commission will review the application and either approve or deny eligibility. The AOM will then notify the program director of the Commission's decision. If approved, the AOM contacts the program director to provide the *FEPAC Self-Study Form*, communicate the required submission date, and outline the timeline for scheduling the site visit. **A program shall not proceed to the Self-Study phase until it has received application approval from the Commission.**

Programs are evaluated based on the FEPAC *Accreditation Standards* in effect on the date the application is submitted.

STEP 2: SELF-STUDY

Upon receiving Commission approval to proceed, a forensic science program seeking initial FEPAC accreditation or re-accreditation must conduct an in-depth self-study to evaluate its compliance with FEPAC *Accreditation Standards*. The Self-Study must provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This requires an in-depth examination of all aspects of the educational program, including curriculum, student achievement, faculty, academic and student support services, resources, facilities, and administration.

The development of the Self-Study must involve all relevant program constituencies, such as administrators, faculty members, field supervisors, practicum coordinators, students, and graduates. Other constituencies, e.g., program advisory committees, employers of graduates, forensic science practitioners, may also play a role in the development of the Self-Study.

RECEIPT OF PROGRAM SELF-STUDY (See FEPAC Self-Study Forms)

The completed Self-Study and any associated fees (see FEPAC *Fees and Dues* Policy) must be submitted in their entirety by the published deadline (refer to FEPAC *Accreditation Timeline* document). No significant curricular or programmatic changes will be considered after this deadline.

REVIEW OF SELF-STUDY – FEPAC ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM INITIAL COMMENTS

The FEPAC Administrative Team (AT), composed of two (2) Commissioners (one academician and one practitioner), are assigned to conduct the initial review of the Program's Self-Study and supporting materials. After completing this review, the AT will provide an initial report to the FEPAC Commission, including a recommendation on whether to proceed with scheduling a site visit.

STEP 3: SITE VISIT

Once approved to proceed, a forensic science program that seeks accreditation or re-accreditation must host a site visit. The primary purpose of the site visit is to verify the content of the program's Self-Study and to review/provide evidence of compliance with FEPAC *Accreditation Standards*. Site visits are normally two (2) days in length; however, FEPAC determines the actual duration based on the number and/or complexity of the programs to be evaluated. The site visit is subject to a fee, which is invoiced once the visit has concluded (see FEPAC *Fees and Dues* Policy).

On-Site Evaluator Team

The On-site team (OST) consists of at least two (2) members, a forensic science academician and a forensic science practitioner, who did not participate in the initial Self Study Report review and with no conflicts of interest. Normally, the forensic science academician serves as chair of the OST.

FEPAC may appoint additional members if warranted by program complexity. An external observer may accompany the team with the permission of the program.

On-Site Evaluator Eligibility

An On-Site Evaluator must be an AAFS Associate Member, Member, Fellow, or an individual appointed by the Commission to serve based upon their qualifications and experience. Per standard practice among accrediting agencies, evaluators remain eligible to serve for up to five (5) years following retirement.

On-Site Evaluators must receive training on *FEPAC Accreditation Standards, Policies and Procedures*, and the accreditation process prior to serving on a team. Evaluators also receive periodic retraining on *FEPAC Accreditation Standards, Policies and Procedures*.

Strict impartiality must be maintained throughout the evaluation process. Individuals assigned to serve on teams are required to notify FEPAC of any real or perceived conflict(s) of interest which might exist with respect to a program being reviewed and decline the assignment (see the *Conflict-of-Interest Policy* and applicable form(s)).

FEPAC informs a program of the AT and OST members it proposes to use in advance of the site visit. The program has the right to request that a team member be replaced if the program believes there is a real or perceived conflict of interest. The Commission will review the program's request, determine if a real or perceived conflict of interest exists, and appoint another person to serve if appropriate. If the program does not assert a conflict of interest, the program director affirms acceptance of the team assignments. (Refer to the applicable *Conflict-of-Interest form*.)

ON-SITE EVALUATION

During the site visit, the OST typically interviews faculty, administrators, students, graduates, field supervisors, practicum directors, and employers of graduates. The team also tours facilities, reviews program records and supporting documentation, and may observe classes.

At the conclusion of the site visit, the OST holds a closing meeting with the program director and any other individuals the program director may wish to have present. The team limits its oral comments to thanking the host institution and providing the next steps in the accreditation process. The OST will not provide observations regarding compliance with the FEPAC Standards, make recommendations to the Commission, or offer opinions to the program regarding the final accreditation outcome.

SITE TEAM RESPONSE

No later than 7 calendar days following the site visit, the OST schedules a teleconference with the AT to provide context and information regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program and evidence of compliance/non-compliance with *FEPAC Accreditation Standards, Policies and Procedures*.

Within 7 calendar days following the teleconference with the AT, the OST enters formal comments into the self-study document regarding *FEPAC Accreditation Standards*.

ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM RESPONSE

After the OST has finalized their comments in the self-study document, the AT reviews the OST comments and report. The AT will then provide a final FEPAC response on the self-study document (i.e., comments on the on-site team observations, requests for more information and/or supplemental materials).

STEP 4: PROGRAM REVIEW & RESPONSE

After the final AT response has been entered into the self-study document, the AOM forwards the self-study document (containing the OST and the AT comments) to the program by the published deadline (refer to FEPAC *Accreditation Timeline* document). The program is allowed fifteen (15) calendar days to submit a written response.

STEP 5: COMMISSION FINAL EVALUATION & DECISION

Prior to making an official accreditation decision, the Commission conducts a comprehensive analysis of the program's compliance with FEPAC *Accreditation Standards, Policies and Procedures*. At a minimum, this analysis consists of a review of the program's Self-Study, OST report and comments, AT review and comments, program responses, and records of any student complaints filed against the program.

The Commission officially makes accreditation decisions for new or renewal applications (pursuant to completion of the self-study) during the Annual Business Meeting (see FEPAC *Accreditation Timeline*), following the completion of the Self-Study process. Beyond compliance with the FEPAC *Accreditation Standards, Policies and Procedures*, in reaching its decision the Commission also evaluates whether a program maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate considering the degrees awarded, is successful in achieving its stated objectives, and maintains degree requirements that conform to commonly accepted standards. In all cases, FEPAC will take appropriate action (e.g., grant accreditation) according to the FEPAC *Commission Actions Policy*.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By
7/1/26	First standalone policy.	Commission