



ACSP

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Executive Committee
July 14, 2024

Dear Planning Accreditation Board,

Greetings. We write on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) to express our concerns about the proposed amendments to the 2022 PAB Accreditation Standards and Criteria. We understand the motivations behind your desire to change the standards, which appear to be influenced by the fear of litigation in states where Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are being challenged. We have many concerns about the proposed changes, specifically standards 1.A, 2.B, and 3.B.

We are concerned about amendments that no longer require programs' strategic plans to articulate Goals and Measurable Objectives with regard to maintaining the diversity of students and faculty (Standard 1.A). The historical underrepresentation of women and minority students and faculty in planning leaves us concerned that without measurable objectives, programs will revert to their default of a White, male-centric dominated student body and faculty.

The watering down of language regarding DEI in the curricula is also worrying. The proposed wording of "...the Program's efforts to advance and support this [the Program's] definition [of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice]" is vague, leaving it up to schools to define DEI as they wish. Furthermore, allowing programs to determine independently their adherence to student and faculty DEI measures will result in inconsistent application across schools or waning commitment to maintaining diverse faculty and student bodies.

We are concerned about programs no longer being required to document "active commitment" to attracting a diverse student body (Standard 2.B). As noted above, this represents a backsliding to programs operating as they have in the past. Likewise, the relaxation of standards for the diversity of faculty is worrying (Standard 3.B). The proposed amendments to Standard 4 are not as damaging to the aims of DEI initiatives, but we believe that the more concrete language contained in the current Standards 1.A, 2.B, and 3.B serve the aspirations of planning much better.

We understand that schools in states with restrictive DEI legislation view PAB's accreditation standards as a protective measure that enables them to continue their DEI initiatives. In states like Florida, Iowa, and Texas, if accreditation standards mandate DEI measures, these could supersede state legislation. Collecting data on where the standards could help schools defend DEI activities will provide a clearer picture on the way forward.

We are not yet aware of any direct challenges to planning accreditation standards. We wonder whether other accrediting bodies have considered these issues. We have not heard of instances where accrediting bodies of fields such as law, medicine, social work, etc., have hastily amended their standards.



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We have also learned that POCIG is actively collecting data on how schools are implementing DEI initiatives in the current environment. PAB could benefit from collecting data from department chairs regarding how they are currently being challenged, what future challenges they anticipate, how they are dealing with current challenges, and how their thoughts on dealing with future challenges.

Given all the uncertainty and unknowns, extending the review period for the proposed amendments until after the upcoming ACSP conference—as has been the case in the past—is prudent. Historically, the conferences have been excellent forums for stakeholders to voice their concerns and contribute to the standards' development. This extension would allow for a more inclusive and thorough consideration of the issues at hand. Given the uncertainty facing institutions that have upcoming accreditation reviews, those institutions should be granted an extension until PAB amendments are finalized through a more robust participatory process.

In conclusion, while we understand and appreciate the motivations behind the proposed amendments, we believe that a weakening of DEI standards is a move in the wrong direction, and a more extended and inclusive participatory process, coupled with data collection, will provide better alternatives on the way forward.

We look forward to continued collaboration and dialogue to promote excellence and DEI in planning education.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee,
Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning