



FAQs: Licensure Policies

What is CACREP and what is CORE?

CACREP is the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs. CORE is the Council on Rehabilitation Education. Both are accrediting bodies for academic preparation programs in counseling. CORE was established in 1971 to accredit rehabilitation counseling programs. CACREP followed in 1981 and accredits graduate counseling programs in addictions counseling; career counseling; clinical mental health counseling; marriage, couple, and family counseling; school counseling; student affairs and college counseling; clinical mental health counseling and clinical rehabilitation counseling; counselor education and supervision; and other specialties. CACREP and CORE became corporate affiliates in 2013 and will merge completely in 2017.

Are CACREP and CORE separate from ACA?

Yes. You may have heard that ACA established CACREP back in the early 1980s, and that is true. However, over the decades, CACREP became separately incorporated (CORE has always been separately incorporated). CACREP and CORE have Boards that are autonomous and completely independent from ACA.

Why does ACA support CACREP/CORE accreditation for counselor licensure?

ACA's position is that CACREP and its affiliate CORE form the accrediting body for academic preparation programs that train professional counselors. The CACREP/CORE standards are rigorous and considered the "gold standard." Having one clear set of educational standards for counseling unifies the profession and reduces confusion among the general public.

Why aren't all counseling programs accredited by CACREP and its affiliate CORE?

Non-accredited programs tend to fall into one of four categories: they want to train counselors their way and not follow an external set of standards, they are small programs and do not have the required number of faculty, they have limited financial resources for fees and resource upgrades, or they are psychology-based programs and wish to keep their focus on psychology rather than professional counseling.

What is MCPAC and does ACA support it?

MCPAC is the Master's in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council. MCPAC was incorporated in 2001 to provide an accrediting organization for master's-level psychology programs. In 2009, MCPAC started an accreditation arm for counseling programs. ACA does not support MCPAC; we endorse CACREP and its affiliate CORE as the accrediting body for professional counseling academic preparation programs.

Do these policies reflect new state licensure regulations?

No. These are ACA policies. Although they are meant to influence state licensure policies, implementation will need to come from each state counseling board.

What is the anticipated timeline for acceptance by state licensing boards?

State licensing boards tend to make changes slowly because they often require legislative changes. Although ACA will actively advocate for the adoption of these policies, change will occur gradually over a period of years. Think of this as a 5-year plan.

If I did not graduate from a CACREP-accredited program, can I still become licensed?

If you did not graduate from a CACREP accredited program, don't panic. Although there is movement in some states to require graduation from a CACREP accredited program, the majority of states do not currently require a CACREP degree for licensure. That will not change in the near future. ACA members can e-mail our professional standards department for the current set of requirements for any particular state at ethics@counseling.org.

If I am licensed but did not graduate from a CACREP accredited program, will I lose my license at some point in the future?

No. Once you have a license, no one will take it away from you as long as you remain in good standing.

What do these new policies mean for me if I am a counseling graduate student?

ACA recommends that graduate students enrolled in programs that are not CACREP accredited earn their degrees, complete their post-graduate requirements, and receive their licenses by July 2020.

What do these new policies mean for me if I received my counseling degree within the last few years and am working toward licensure?

ACA recommends that new professionals who graduated from programs that were not CACREP accredited complete all requirements and receive their licenses by July 2020.

What do these new policies mean for me if I already have a counseling license?

As mentioned previously, the issuance of a license is permanent as long as you remain in good standing. You will never lose your license because of the accreditation status of your graduate program. If you completed your counseling degree from a program that was not CACREP accredited and decide to move, ACA will advocate with your new home state that you should have reciprocity and be issued a license.

Why are there different timelines in the policies?

There are two timelines in the policies, and they both speak to different—although related—issues. The first focuses on getting current students and new professionals who are just learning about these policies through the pipeline. ACA advocates that all counselors who achieve licensure by the end of July 2020, regardless of the accreditation status of their graduate program, be regarded as qualified independent practitioners with all professional privileges and practice options. After July 2020, ACA advocates for graduation from a counselor education program accredited by CACREP/CORE as the pathway to licensure for independent practice. This timeline protects current students and new professionals from evolving standards while allowing future students to make an informed decision about the graduate program they enter.

The second timeline focuses on encouraging state licensing boards to allow students and new professionals in the pipeline to be licensed under existing standards for a period of 7 years after a CACREP/CORE degree requirement is adopted. As with the above timeline, this protects current students and new professionals from changing standards while allowing future students to make an informed decision about the graduate programs they enter.

What kinds of things should CACREP school counseling track students do to demonstrate clinical coursework requirements, as per the third policy?

School counseling students who want to become licensed for independent practice should take coursework that focuses on psychotherapy, diagnosis, evaluation; administration of assessments, tests and appraisals; referral; and the establishment of counseling plans for the treatment of individuals, couples, groups and families with emotional, mental, addiction and physical disorders.

If my program became CACREP accredited after I graduated, can I say to a licensing board that I came from a counseling program accredited by CACREP?

CACREP's policy is that a student shall be considered a graduate of a CACREP program if they receive their degree within eighteen (18) months prior to when accreditation is conferred and if the program can verify that the student completed the CACREP program requirements. Policies can change, so please contact CACREP through their website at www.cacrep.org for current information.

If my program was CACREP accredited when I graduated but lost accreditation later, can I say to a licensing board that I came from a CACREP accredited program?

Yes. The status of your program at the time of your graduation is what counts.

Does ACA support a counseling psychology degree for licensure as a professional counselor?

No. ACA considers psychology to be a separate and independent profession from counseling. As such, those with psychology degrees—including counseling psychology—should focus on licensure within the profession of psychology.

The policies reference independent practice. Does this mean that they only apply to counselors in private practice?

No. The term "independent practice" is meant to be a generic term to distinguish a license that leads to the independent practice of counseling from one that leads to a school counseling license. These policies focus on counselors in all settings where a clinically focused license (LPC or equivalent) is found including mental health centers, hospitals, college counseling centers, and substance abuse clinics.

How can I keep up with changes in counselor licensure regulations as well as public policy issues such as Medicare, TRICARE, and Veterans Administration eligibility?

Regularly visit the ACA website (www.counseling.org), with a focus on the Government Affairs section. Read ACA e-News when it is electronically delivered to you, as e-News is a great tool for keeping current. Finally, join ACA's social media site ACA Connect at community.counseling.org and both view and participate in discussions about current issues and evolving standards.

What if I still have questions?

ACA members can contact our professional standards staff at ethics@counseling.org

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