



ABHES BULLETIN

To: ABHES-Accredited Institutions and Programs
From: India Y. Tips, Executive Director
Date: July 22, 2020
Subject: COVID-19 – Summer Updates

As the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to affect our institutions and their operations, institutions should continue to execute their emergency preparedness protocols and continuity education/operation plans. Institutions must continue to maintain documentation of any temporary waivers of regulations received from federal, state or other regulatory bodies governing the operation of the institution and/or its program(s).

The guidance provided within this notice contains updated information to complement previous Bulletins. ABHES remains open to a range of flexible and creative solutions that support students enrolled in our accredited institutions and programs, including efforts made to ensure students meet required professional program competencies in compliance with applicable federal, state and credentialing requirements for entry-level employment.

ABHES Operations

The ABHES office continues to operate during its normal business hours of Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern Time. Staff continue to work remotely and are available to address any questions and provide support services via telephone or email. **As a reminder, all correspondence and payments to ABHES must be submitted electronically. Please follow the [Submission Requirements](#) to ensure proper and timely processing.** We are committed to working with you during these challenging times. Additional updates will continue to be provided when there is new or changing guidance.

At its meeting held July 15-17, 2020, the Commission reviewed and considered school actions. The results of the Commission's reviews will be provided in writing to the individual institutions on or before August 14, 2020. The Commission also considered proposed revisions to its *Accreditation Manual* that align with new U.S. Department of Education regulations that became effective on July 1, 2020. Details regarding those revisions will be posted by August 1, 2020 and will be effective upon publication. Additionally, ABHES will welcome the input of institutions, programs and other stakeholders on both new and proposed revisions with a Call for Comment to be published on or before August 28, 2020. All comments received will be considered by the Commission this fall. More details will be provided soon.

Clinical Experiences

ABHES is aware that many of its accredited institutions and programs continue to encounter challenges in providing formal external clinical education experiences for enrolled students due to limitations attributable to COVID-19. ABHES continues to defer to state regulatory bodies with oversight responsibility for specific educational programs (e.g., nursing).

If an institution deems it necessary to continue to use a broader array of approaches, such as simulation, which are not supported either by the ABHES *Accreditation Manual* or temporary waivers of other applicable regulations, it may be considered out of compliance. When assessing compliance with accreditation standards, ABHES will take the need for flexibility into consideration as long as documentation is maintained to demonstrate the institution's efforts to safeguard students and maintain the integrity of the educational process. More specifically, it is strongly advised that institutions maintain, and have available for review, documentation that demonstrates the need for using such methods and explains how the program incorporated the administrative team, program advisory committee, employers and community partners into its decision-making process. The burden remains on the institution to document that qualified program personnel employed by the institution who meet the minimum qualifications of program faculty, ensure that students demonstrate required competencies for entry-level employment as a basis for program completion.

Distance Education

ABHES continues to follow its normal procedures for reviewing distance education applications submitted by institutions and programs intending to pursue formal approval of new or expanded distance education methods. Approval of these applications provides for formal ABHES approval of the distance education delivery modalities to be included within the current grant of accreditation. The most current version of the distance education applications are available at <https://www.abhes.org/resources/#Applications>.

For those institutions and programs that do not wish to pursue formal approval for new or expanded distance education methods given plans to resume residential delivery of ABHES-approved programs once limitations attributable to COVID-19 are lifted, may seek extended temporary approval by submitting the information outlined in the May 22, 2020 ABHES Bulletin available for download at https://www.abhes.org/news_item/coronavirus-update/.

Virtual Visits

In accordance with the guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education regarding temporary flexibilities that help accrediting agencies serve institutions and students through the period of COVID-19 interruption, ABHES has suspended business travel through December 31, 2020, and has implemented a new virtual visit policy for institutions and programs required to undergo site visits in the fall 2020 travel cycle.

Virtual visits will permit ABHES to meet its obligations for quality assurance of accredited institutions and programs and permit applicants to continue to progress through the initial accreditation process. The objective of the virtual visit is to assess, in a virtual environment, each accreditation standard normally reviewed and evaluated during an on-site visit. Further, although ABHES may take a final accreditation action based upon a virtual visit, a follow up on-site visit will be required to, at a minimum, reassess the facility and to survey students within one year of that final action. Institutions will be informed of this requirement at the time it receives notice of the action.

Each institution required to undergo a virtual visit this fall will be contacted directly within the next thirty days and provided with details regarding scheduling, preparation requirements, fees, and other essential information.

Accreditation Workshops

ABHES will host its next two scheduled Accreditation Workshops via live webinar on September 17, 2020, and October 6, 2020. Participants already registered will receive an email from ABHES with more information. Those who wish to register may do so by visiting <https://abhes.org/events/>.

Annual Report

New automation efforts are underway at ABHES which include a new Annual Report. The new Annual Report will consist of three parts. Part one will be an online questionnaire that will ask you to verify general information, as well as Institutional or Programmatic accreditation information. Part two will require the institution to download and complete a spreadsheet(s) for each program (that is active as of June 30, 2020). Additionally, you may also be asked to upload supporting documentation. Part three will be a separate financial section under a separate password. The new Annual Report is scheduled to go into production on or before September 16, 2020. ABHES staff will conduct several webinars on how to complete the new Annual Report in September and October.

The new Annual Report and Guidebook for the reporting period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020 will be posted in September 2020, for submission in December 2020.

Questions

Please contact ABHES staff with specific questions concerning your institution or program's compliance or accreditation. Please visit the [Our Staff](#) page on the ABHES website for specific staff member contact information. If you are unsure of where to direct your questions, please contact India Tips, Executive Director, at itips@abhes.org or Amy Rowe, Associate Executive Director of Membership Services, at arowe@abhes.org.