

POLICY 201

CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR TRANSITION-TO-PRACTICE PROGRAMS

To ensure that all matters dealing with the accreditation of programs by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) are conducted with integrity, fairness, impartiality, and objectivity, the ACEN has adopted this transition-to-practice policy addressing conflict of interest, conduct, and confidentiality.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR PEER EVALUATORS

In all circumstances, not only conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of conflicts of interest, must be avoided. All peer evaluators, Commissioners, Appeal Panel members, and any other individuals who act on behalf of the ACEN shall not have direct involvement with and/or participate in any decision-making capacity for a transition-to-practice program if they have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the transition-to-practice program. Actual or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Being a current employee of** ~~Maintaining employment with or serving as a graduate advisee/advisor involving~~ the sponsoring organization that is under review;
2. Being a current student, former student, or graduate of the sponsoring organization that is under review;
3. Being a current employee or former employee of the sponsoring organization that is under review;
4. **Being employed** ~~Maintaining employment~~ in the same state as the transition-to-practice program that is under review;
5. Having served as a peer evaluator in the past three years on any ACEN accreditation matter involving the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization that is under review;
6. Having served as a consultant in the past three years on any accreditation matters involving the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization that is under review;
- ~~7. Having jointly authored research or literature, participated in a common consortium, or been involved in special research with current program educators of the transition-to-practice program that is under review;~~
8. Having served in an evaluation role in the past three years for an agency other than the ACEN regarding the same transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization that is under review, including but not limited to membership on the board for the state regulatory agency, regional accreditation teams, or evaluation committees for boards of trustees or regents;
9. Having been paid or otherwise profited or appeared to profit from service in the past three years to the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization that is under review;
10. Having affiliations or close personal or professional relationships in the past three years with key personnel in the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization that is under review;

11. Having immediate family members who are current employees, board members, or nurse residents at the sponsoring organization that is under review;
12. Having a current financial interest in the sponsoring organization that is under review, including but not limited to ownership of shares of stock in the sponsoring organization or any parent of the sponsoring organization, excepting shares or interests held indirectly, such as in mutual funds, insurance policies, or blind trusts. In addition, having any immediate family members with any of the above financial interests; and
13. Having any other relationship or reason that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the transition-to-practice program that is under review.

CONDUCT AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR TRANSITION-TO-PRACTICE PROGRAMS AND PEER EVALUATORS

Responsibilities of Transition-to-Practice Programs Seeking Accreditation

1. It is the responsibility of each transition-to-practice program to facilitate a thorough and objective appraisal of its transition-to-practice program.
2. Transition-to-practice programs may veto a peer evaluator if it can be demonstrated, in writing to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer, that an actual or a potential conflict of interest exists.
3. Any perceived inadequacies of the ACEN procedures or processes should be reported by the nurse administrator of the transition-to-practice program to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer at the time of the occurrence rather than withheld until after the ACEN Board of Commissioners makes an accreditation decision.

Responsibilities of Peer Evaluators

1. Any Commissioner who was a member of a site visit team for a transition-to-practice program under consideration or resides in or is currently employed in the same state as the transition-to-practice program under consideration must recuse her/himself from the discussion about the transition-to-practice program and abstain from voting.
2. Any Commissioner who is employed by a sponsoring organization of a transition-to-practice program being considered for accreditation must recuse her/himself from the portion of the Commission meeting agenda concerned with the evaluation of that transition-to-practice program and abstain from voting.
3. ~~Peer evaluators will be reminded of the confidentiality of all information pertaining to the review of transition-to-practice programs and the need to avoid any actions that might give the appearance of a conflict of interest or could reasonably be perceived as affecting their objectivity.~~ Peer evaluators are required to refrain from accepting membership on a team, recuse themselves from the discussion during the review of any transition-to-practice program if their presence would constitute or appear to constitute a conflict of interest, and abstain from voting if a conflict of interest is identified.

Actions to be Avoided by Peer Evaluators

1. Advertising of one's status as an ACEN peer evaluator for the purpose of consulting;

2. Soliciting consultation arrangements with transition-to-practice programs preparing for accreditation review;
3. Giving advice to a transition-to-practice program or consulting for a transition-to-practice program for a period of two years after serving as a peer evaluator on any ACEN transition-to-practice program accreditation matter; and
4. Offering definitive answers related to any ACEN policies and procedures or Transition-to-Practice Standards and Criteria.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST, CONDUCT, AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ACEN STAFF

In all circumstances, not only conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of conflicts of interest, must be avoided. No staff member shall have direct involvement with a transition-to-practice program if they have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the transition-to-practice program.

Staff members should inform the ACEN Chief Executive Officer where an actual or potential conflict of interest exists. A conflict of interest exists if a staff member:

1. Was a compensated consultant, appointee, employee of, or candidate for employment at the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization within the past three years;
2. Has a close personal or familial relationship with persons at the sponsoring organization;
3. Has a strong bias regarding the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization;
4. Has any other relationship or reason that could serve as an impediment to acting in an impartial, objective professional manner toward the transition-to-practice program or sponsoring organization; or
5. Has a current financial interest in the sponsoring organization under review, including but not limited to ownership of shares of stock in the sponsoring organization or any parent of the sponsoring organization, excepting shares or interests held indirectly, such as but not limited to in mutual funds, insurance policies, or blind trusts, or has any immediate family members with any of the aforementioned financial interests.

In addition, staff members are prohibited from accepting fees, awards, or honorary degrees from a sponsoring organization with a transition-to-practice program that is accredited by the ACEN.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR PEER EVALUATORS AND ACEN STAFF

To ensure that all matters dealing with the accreditation of transition-to-practice programs are conducted with integrity, fairness, impartiality, and objectivity, **the ACEN has adopted this confidentiality policy.** Individuals **individuals** who participate in ACEN activities, including but not limited to peer evaluators and ACEN staff members, must maintain confidentiality with regards to all non-public information related to the accreditation review and consideration of a

transition-to-practice program by the ACEN. Accordingly, peer evaluators and ACEN staff members shall conduct themselves as follows:

1. Documents, reports, and other materials prepared by the transition-to-practice program for the ACEN must be treated as confidential materials in the absence of specific policies that make clear the degree and extent of their exposure. The ACEN will release materials **only** in response to a valid court order or otherwise as may be required by law.
2. All materials pertinent to the transition-to-practice program under review are considered confidential materials prepared for use by the ACEN and should not be shown to or discussed with anyone other than peer evaluators and ACEN staff members as appropriate and when necessary.
3. **Hold confidential** the accreditation decision issued by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. **The decision** will be communicated to the transition-to-practice program leaders in writing **only** by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer.
4. A peer evaluator or ACEN staff member shall not share with a sponsoring organization/transition-to-practice program employee or any other person information about the review proceedings.
5. Any request by a peer evaluator for additional information from the sponsoring organization/transition-to-practice program following a site visit must be directed to the ACEN **professional** staff. There will be no direct communication between a peer evaluator and the sponsoring organization and/or transition-to-practice program under review except in preparation for an upcoming site visit.

DISCLOSURE MEMORANDUM AND COMMITMENT TO COMPLY WITH ACEN CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY 201

(To be signed prior to each assignment or at each meeting and signed by ACEN staff annually)

TO: Peer Evaluator, Commissioner, Appeal Panel Member, and ACEN Staff

DATE: (Each ACEN activity)

I have received and read the ACEN Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy 201 and agree to comply in all respects with this Policy.

I understand my duties to avoid any actual conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest regarding any transition-to-practice program seeking initial or continuing accreditation with the ACEN. I understand that I shall not ever have direct involvement with and/or participate in any decision-making capacity for a transition-to-practice program if I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the transition-to-practice program and/or sponsoring organization. I further understand that I have a duty to disclose an actual or potential conflict of interest as described in Policy 201 that must be exercised as soon as the conflict becomes apparent. Accordingly, I will recuse myself and will not participate in the discussion of, visit to, or vote on any transition-to-practice program seeking initial or continuing

accreditation in which I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the transition to practice program and/or sponsoring organization.

I also understand and agree to all the provisions in Policy #201 related to my conduct and my obligation to maintain confidentiality of all information regarding each transition to practice program accredited by or seeking initial or continuing accreditation with the ACEN.

Signature

Date

Prior to each site visit or Board of Commissioners meeting, each peer evaluator will sign, electronically or handwritten, an attestation that they agree to comply with all aspects of the ACEN Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy #201. Annually, each ACEN staff member will sign, electronically or handwritten, an attestation that they agree to comply with all aspects of the ACEN Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy #201.

Policy 201 History
Initial Approval: July 24, 2019
Revised: ___ 2020