

STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION  
OF POST-GRADUATE CRNA FELLOWSHIPS

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## Preamble

The Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (Council) accredits nurse anesthesia programs within the United States and Puerto Rico that award post-master's certificates, master's, or doctoral degrees, including programs offering distance education. Students accepted into accredited entry-level programs on or after January 1, 2022, must graduate with doctoral degrees. The Council also offers accreditation for Post-Graduate CRNA Fellowships (Fellowship).

The accreditation standards for entry-level nurse anesthesia programs offering practice doctorate degrees and accreditation standards for post-graduate fellowships are written with input from a wide community of interest consisting of many individuals and groups, including certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) practitioners and educators; nurse anesthesia students; administrators and faculty of colleges and universities; hospital administrators; state boards of nursing; the staff of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE); the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and other nationally recognized accreditation agencies; members of the National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA); and the Board of Directors of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA). Special recognition is given to members attending the Assembly of School Faculty meetings and to those on the AANA Education Committee for their continuing efforts to promote, support, and encourage the Council's objectives of quality assessment and enhancement in nurse anesthesia education through the accreditation process.

### Practice Doctorate Programs

The Standards are designed to prepare graduates with competencies for entry into anesthesia practice.

*Entry into practice competencies for the nurse anesthesia professional prepared at the practice doctoral level are those required at the time of graduation to provide safe, competent, and ethical anesthesia and anesthesia-related care to patients for diagnostic, therapeutic, and surgical procedures.*

*Entry into practice competencies should be viewed as the structure upon which nurse anesthetists continue to acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities along the practice continuum that starts at graduation (proficient), and continues throughout their entire professional careers (expert).*

## **Post-Graduate CRNA Fellowships**

A Fellowship accredited by the Council contains advanced education and training in a focused area of specialty practice or concentration. The Fellowship is developed for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs). Non-clinical Fellowships may be applicable to other advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) (*see Glossary “Advanced Practice Registered Nurse”*). Although each Fellowship may be unique, the Standards are intended to promote quality and consistency for accreditation purposes. These Standards apply to Fellowships conducted face-to-face and/or via distance education.

## **Future Revisions**

Suggestions for future revisions should be forwarded to:

Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs  
10275 W. Higgins Rd., Suite 906  
Rosemont, Illinois 60018-5603

## A. CONDUCTING ORGANIZATION STANDARDS

1. The Fellowship has a clearly defined mission and purpose.
2. The Fellowship resources are adequate to provide the educational experiences and opportunities required to fulfill the needs of the Fellowship.
3. The organization clearly states the title of the Fellowship, to include the focused area of specialty practice or concentration.
4. Fellowships involving patient care are limited to CRNA Fellows.
5. Fellowships for CRNAs that involve patient care must uphold the *AANA Scope of Nurse Anesthesia Practice, AANA Standards for Nurse Anesthesia Practice*, requirements of a certification agency in the specialty (NBCRNA specialty certification, if available, and/or other applicable standards and guidelines).

## B. FACULTY/MENTOR STANDARDS

1. The Fellowship has a director and faculty/mentors who are credentialed experts, and/or who are experientially and/or academically qualified in the area of specialty practice or concentration (*see Glossary "Credentialed Expert," "Faculty/Mentors," and "Experientially Qualified"*).
2. The faculty/mentors are committed to providing effective training of Fellows and a quality educational environment conducive to learning.
3. The faculty/mentors document evaluations of the Fellow at regular intervals and at the completion of the Fellowship.

## C. FELLOW STANDARDS

1. The Fellow meets the Fellowship's admission criteria and holds licensure as a registered professional nurse and/or APRN as required by state law (*see Glossary "Advanced Practice Registered Nurse"*).
2. Only CRNAs or other APRNs are enrolled, who by academic and experiential achievement have the ability to benefit from their education (*see Glossary "Advanced Practice Registered Nurse" and "Ability to Benefit"*).
3. The CRNA Fellow is certified/recertified by the National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA).
4. The CRNA Fellow maintains an accurate record of clinical procedures personally performed on patients, if applicable, and other educational experiences.
5. The non-CRNA Fellow maintains an accurate record of educational experiences.
6. The Fellow demonstrates professionalism, including a commitment to educational, professional, and personal integrity. The CRNA Fellow subscribes to the AANA *Code of Ethics for the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist*.

## D. GRADUATE STANDARDS

1. At the completion of the Fellowship, the Fellow demonstrates knowledge and skills required of the area of specialty practice or concentration.
2. At the completion of the Fellowship, the Fellow demonstrates attainment of objectives/outcomes identified by the Fellowship.

## **E. CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

1. The Fellowship is designed to provide the CRNA with knowledge and skills in a focused area of specialty practice or concentration.
2. The goals and objectives/outcomes of the Fellowship are clearly identified.
3. The length of the Fellowship is of sufficient duration to meet the goals and objectives/outcomes of the Fellowship.
4. The Fellowship must be primarily learning oriented with educational considerations taking precedence over any service delivery and revenue generation.
5. Fellowships designed to develop and/or augment the Fellow's clinical scope of practice must include a sufficient number of patient care experiences in the curriculum to ensure competency (see Glossary, "*Patient care experiences*"). Simulated clinical experiences may augment learning but cannot replace patient care experiences.

## **F. CLINICAL SITE STANDARDS (IF APPLICABLE)**

1. The patient population available to the CRNA Fellow is adequate to achieve the goals and objectives/outcomes of the Fellowship.
2. Mentored experiences are available for the CRNA Fellow to achieve the goals and objectives/outcomes of the Fellowship.

## G. POLICY STANDARDS

1. The Fellowship submits the *COA Post-Graduate Fellowship Transcript* to the COA for each Fellow who completes the Fellowship (see Glossary “*COA Post-Graduate Fellowship Transcript*”).
2. The Fellowship provides the Fellow with a copy of the *COA Post-Graduate Fellowship Transcript* (see Glossary “*COA Post-Graduate Fellowship Transcript*”).
3. Truth and accuracy are evidenced in recruiting and admission practices, publications, and advertising.
4. Fellowships document that non-CRNA Fellows attest they will not represent themselves as CRNAs by title or function based on completion of a Fellowship.
5. The Fellowship is conducted in accordance with state and federal guidelines that govern the focused area of specialty practice or concentration.

## H. EVALUATION STANDARDS

1. The Fellow evaluates the quality of the Fellowship including faculty/mentors and, if applicable, clinical experiences.
2. The Fellowship uses evaluation data to make improvements.



## Glossary

**Ability to Benefit** - The ability to benefit refers to the integrity of a college/university or education program to enroll only those individuals with the capacity to succeed and gain value from the education.

**Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN)** - APRN refers to advanced practice nurses in the roles of certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse-midwives, certified nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse specialists. It is recognized that states vary in the titles they use for the different advanced practice nursing roles. Fellowships may enroll advanced practice nurses regardless of title authorized by state.

**COA Post-Graduate Fellowship Transcript** - The official COA document attests to successful completion of the Fellowship. Elements required on the transcript include: title of the Fellowship; the APRN role and population focus of the Fellow's national certification upon admission to the Fellowship; length of Fellowship; and specification of the goals and objectives/outcomes identified by the Fellowship and verification of attainment by the Fellow. If a Fellowship includes a clinical component, an accurate history of procedures and other clinical experiences must be included. The transcript must include the types and numbers of cases required for specialty certification when such certification is available. The transcript must be signed by the Fellowship director.

**Credentialed Expert** - An individual awarded a certificate, letter or other document attesting to her or his knowledge, skills, and ability to practice is a credentialed expert. The credential must attest to the bearer's right and authority to provide services in the area of specialization for which she or he has been trained.

**Experientially Qualified** - The director and preceptors must possess experience in the area of specialty practice and/or concentration.

**Faculty/Mentors** - Mentorship is an important component of fellowships. A mentor is an experienced individual who advises and guides a fellow. Mentoring is a developmental partnership through which a faculty/mentor shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the growth of a fellow. Faculty/mentors are committed to creating a quality educational environment conducive to learning.

**Patient Care Experiences** – Fellows personally provide care to actual patients in the clinical environment<sup>1</sup> and must include the full range of experiences appropriate to the area of specialty practice or concentration for which fellows are being prepared. Competency determinations must be validated by evaluation of the fellow’s performance with patients in the clinical environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Does not include simulation or cadaver experiences.

## **Appendix**

### **Mission, Purposes, and Objectives of the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs**

#### **Mission Statement**

The Council's mission, through its accreditation activities, is to (1) (a) grant public accreditation recognition to nurse anesthesia programs and institutions that award post master's certificates, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees that meet nationally established standards of academic quality and (b) assist nurse anesthesia programs and institutions in improving educational quality, and (2) (a) grant public accreditation recognition to educational programs, institutions and individuals that award post graduate certificates, diplomas, and award education credit for fellowships that meets nationally established standards of academic quality and (b) assist programs, institutions and individuals in improving educational quality.

#### **The goals of the Council are to:**

1. Pursue its mission, goals and objectives and conduct its operations with integrity.
2. Formulate and/or adopt standards, criteria, policies, and procedures for the accreditation of nurse anesthesia educational programs and fellowships, subject to review and comment by all constituencies that are significantly affected by them.
3. Foster academic quality in educational programs and fellowships.
4. Utilize evaluation to measure a program's or fellowship's degree of success in meeting programmatic objectives and accreditation requirements within the context of its institutional mission and resources.
5. Encourage innovations in program and fellowship design and/or experimental programs and fellowships that are based on sound educational principles.
6. Ensure responsiveness to its communities of interest including, but not limited to, students, programs, fellowships, and the public.
7. Foster student achievement and continuous program improvement as a basis of promoting quality nurse anesthesia services to the public.
8. Incorporate public involvement in its decision making related to quality and accountability.

**The objectives of the Council are to:**

1. Publish standards of accreditation and policies and procedures defining the accreditation process for nurse anesthesia graduate programs and fellowships with input from the communities of interest.
2. Periodically assess programs and fellowships for compliance with accreditation standards through annual reports, self studies, site visits, and progress reports.
3. Confer and publish accreditation decisions and the reasons for the decisions.
4. Require programs and fellowships to routinely provide reliable performance and information data to the public.
5. Offer consultation concerning nurse anesthesia education to enhance academic quality.
6. Conduct collaborative reviews with other accrediting agencies, as appropriate.
7. Maintain external recognition by recognized authorities.
8. Participate in a systematic self-assessment of the standards, policies, and procedures of accreditation to ensure accuracy and reliability.
9. Provide accurate information concerning accredited programs and fellowships.
10. Consider legitimate allegations from complainants concerning the accreditation process.
11. Employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision-making.
12. Ensure the academic quality of distance and traditional educational offerings.

## The Value of Accreditation

Accreditation is a voluntary activity that has been accepted for more than 100 years in the U.S. in contrast to other countries where governments supervise and control educational institutions. The goals of privately operated U.S. accrediting agencies are to assure and improve the quality of education offered by the institutions and programs they accredit. In this system, accreditation by an accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education is necessary for institutions and programs to receive federal funds and for students to receive federal aid. Accrediting agencies recognized by federal and state governments are deemed reliable authorities of academic quality.

The large percentage of Americans who benefit from higher education, the reputation of U.S. universities for both fundamental and applied research, and the widespread availability of professional services in the United States all attest to the high quality of postsecondary education and the success of the accreditation system that U.S. institutions and professions have devised to promote quality.

Accreditation is a peer process whereby a private, nongovernmental agency grants public recognition to an institution or specialized program that meets or exceeds nationally established standards of acceptable educational quality. A guiding principle of accreditation is the recognition that institutions or specialized programs have a right to expect that they will be evaluated in the light of their own stated purposes, as long as those purposes are educationally appropriate, meet accreditation standards, and fall within the recognized scope of the accrediting body.

There are two fundamental reasons for accreditation: (1) to ensure quality assessment, and (2) to assist in quality improvement. Accreditation, which applies to institutions or programs, must be distinguished from certification and licensure, which apply to individuals. Accreditation cannot guarantee the quality of individual graduates, but it can provide reasonable assurance of the context and quality of the education that is offered.

Accreditation provides services that are of value to several constituencies:

### **The public receives:**

1. reasonable assurance of the external evaluation of a program and its conformity with general expectations in the professional field;
2. identification of programs that have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving their quality and their successful execution;

3. improvement in the professional services available to the public, resulting from the modification of program requirements to reflect changes in knowledge and practice that are generally accepted in the field;
4. less need for intervention by public agencies in the operations of educational programs, because of the availability of private accreditation for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality.

**Students benefit from:**

1. reasonable assurance that the educational activities of an accredited program have been found to be satisfactory and meet the needs of students;
2. assistance in transferring credits among programs and institutions;
3. a uniform prerequisite for entering the profession.

**Programs receive:**

1. the stimulus needed for self-directed improvement;
2. peer review and counsel provided by the accrediting agency;
3. enhancement of their reputation, because of the public's regard for accreditation;
4. eligibility for selected governmental funding programs and private foundation grants.

**The profession realizes:**

1. a means for participation of practitioners in establishing the requirements for preparation to enter the profession;
2. a contribution to the unity of the profession by bringing together practitioners, educators, students, and the communities of interest in an activity directed toward improving professional preparation and practice.

**References:**

- *The Value of Accreditation*, Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2010.
- *The Importance of Specialized Accreditation: A Message to Our Publics*, ASPA, 2007.

## The Accreditation Process

The Council is responsible for establishing the standards for accreditation of nurse anesthesia educational programs and post-graduate CRNA fellowships, subject to consideration of recommendations from the communities of interest. In an effort of ongoing improvement, the standards will undergo continual review and be subject to periodic major and minor revisions as indicated. Compliance with the standards forms the basis for the Council's accreditation decisions.

Ongoing oversight by the Council is provided between formal programmatic reviews. Programs are required to advise the Council and get approval for major changes. The Council also investigates situations brought to its attention that may affect a program's accreditation status.

In a broad sense, accreditation of nurse anesthesia educational programs and fellowships provides quality assurance concerning educational preparation through continuous self study and review. The ultimate goals of the accreditation program are to improve the quality of nurse anesthesia education and provide competent nurse anesthetists for healthcare consumers and employers.

### Practice Doctorate Standards

The practice doctorate standards address: (A) conducting institutions, (B) faculty, (C) students, (D) graduates, (E) curricula, (F) clinical sites, (G) policies, and (H) evaluations.

The accreditation process for established programs is based on the self-evaluation study document prepared by the program and an onsite review by a team of two or three reviewers. Certain criteria have been ascertained to have major significance regarding educational quality. Failure to fully comply with one or more of these criteria is considered to be of critical concern in decisions regarding nurse anesthesia program accreditation and is marked with an asterisk (\*). The Council reserves the right to identify other areas or criteria.

The process is repeated at intervals of up to 10 years. A summary report of the review is presented to the Council for an accreditation decision. New programs that seek accreditation status must successfully complete an initial accreditation review, become accredited, admit students and undergo a subsequent review when it is possible to evaluate educational outcomes following the first graduation. Each program is required to complete and submit an annual report.

Graduation from an accredited program is a prerequisite for eligibility for national certification. It is also used as a criterion by licensing agencies, employers, and potential students in the decisions they make and in determining eligibility for government funding.

## **Post-Graduate CRNA Fellowships**

The Post-Graduate CRNA Fellowship standards address: (A) conducting organizations, (B) faculty/mentors, (C) fellows, (D) graduates, (E) curricula, (F) clinical sites, (G) policies, and (H) evaluations.

The accreditation process for Fellowships is based on the post-graduate fellowship assessment document prepared by the fellowship and a virtual onsite review by the Fellowship Review Committee. Accreditation may be offered for onetime fellowships, or continuous/intermittent fellowships. Continuous/intermittent fellowships may be accredited for intervals of up to 5 years. New fellowships that seek accreditation status must successfully complete an initial post-graduate CRNA fellowship assessment, become accredited, and admit fellows. Only fellows enrolled after accreditation is awarded will graduate from an accredited fellowship.



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