

COMMISSION ON MASSAGE THERAPY ACCREDITATION

# Policy and Procedure Manual

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**Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation**  
**Effective April 2021**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The term accreditation implies a generally accepted process by which a school or program is evaluated. Schools with accreditation may, therefore, be said to have achieved a minimum level of excellence, based on an accepted set of standards.

The benefit of accreditation to a profession lies in the fact that, the public to whom the profession is rendering a service is assured of a certain standard of quality from the graduates of accredited schools. Such assurance raises the profession in the eyes of the public and increases the public's confidence.

COMTA aspires to the highest level of integrity in the process of program and institutional accreditation. Programs and institutions seeking accreditation will demonstrate honesty and integrity and agree to comply with all COMTA standards, decisions, policies, and procedures both during the accreditation process and throughout the term of accreditation.

Applicants may choose from one of two types of accreditation that COMTA has the authority to offer.

COMTA grants *institutional accreditation* to freestanding institutions offering massage therapy and bodywork or esthetics/skin care programs. COMTA is concerned with the entire school, including all of the strengths and concerns, as described in the school's Self-Study Report and observed by the on-site evaluation team. In addition to requiring that accredited schools adhere to the Standards, COMTA ascertains how well the school meets its own objectives.

*Programmatic accreditation*, available to programs within an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education is granted to an institution's educational program, focusing on program content, quality, and institutional stability. Program accreditation ensures that the school's program in massage therapy or aesthetics/esthetics/skin care reaches the minimum standards set by the profession.

Accreditation is a voluntary process dependent on high standards of integrity. Each institution is expected to impress upon its staff and faculty the importance of personal and professional integrity. Breaches in integrity invalidate the process and the program or institution's status.

Accreditation processes are invariably composed of three components:

1. The self-study in which the program and institution initiate a process of self-evaluation, answering a set of specific questions about all of its parts, ranging from its mission and objectives to fiscal responsibility.
2. The peer review, in which the objective, independent accrediting agency reviews the report and sends a team of educational, administrative, and financial experts to the school to verify the self-study.
3. The final evaluation and decision by an independent accrediting commission. The Commission accredits programs and institutions and performs ongoing monitoring of their compliance with COMTA Standards and Policies. Review of annual reports and of institutions'/programs' responses to Commission's expressed concerns is part of this monitoring process. The Commission reserves the right to require a special site visit or special report if there is credible reason to question the programs'/institutions' continued compliance with the Standards. Such special visits or reports may be required by the Executive Committee and the timeframe for the visit or report will be established by the Executive Committee. Failure to cooperate with a special site visit or to submit required reports is grounds for probation or revocation of accreditation.

## **II. HISTORY**

In 1982, the AMTA Council of Schools (COS) was established, in recognition of a shared concern among educators and school Executive Directors for the quality of massage therapy education. Early Council work focused on the need to develop and maintain educational standards.

The Commission on Massage Training Approval/Accreditation was established in 1989. In the following two years, with the assistance of AMTA's Program Approval Review Committee (PARC), COS, and additional AMTA volunteers and staff, COMTAA created and implemented standards, policies and procedures that would meet the rigorous standards of the USDE for accrediting agencies. Recognition by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) was pursued as a developmental stage toward the ultimate goal of USDE recognition.

In 1992, Congress passed amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 in an effort to combat widespread fraud, waste, and abuse in the Federal Title IV financial aid programs. This law requires USDE-recognized accrediting agencies to act as gatekeeper of federal funds. The responsibility for oversight of student loan programs for years had been shared by states, accrediting agencies, and the USDE. Congress determined that this triad was not able to guarantee program integrity and financial accountability in higher education institutions. The Amendments created a new triad in which the states (which gained new enforcement capability) and the accrediting agencies (which received new requirements to meet) each have responsibility for monitoring and reporting to each other and the USDE.

In 1997, the Commission voted to end the approval status as of March 31, 1999, and change the name to the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA). USDE granted recognition on July 10, 2002. In 2004, COMTA became a completely independent organization. On November 8, 2004, COMTA's USDE recognition was continued for five years, and the scope of practice was expanded to include accreditation of academic associate degree programs. As part of the renewal of recognition process in 2010, COMTA requested an expansion into occupational associate degrees and esthetics. The expansions were both approved, and COMTA's recognition was continued in 2010, with a follow-up review scheduled for December 2012. COMTA's most recent review took place in December, 2015, followed by a five-year approval granted.

## **III. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSION**

### *Commissioners*

COMTA-recognized institutions and programs in good standing elect non-appointed Commissioners. Each institution/program is entitled to cast one vote for each commissioner position up for election. Commissioners are elected to four-year terms, and may stand for re-election. The Commission shall be composed of individuals chosen to reflect the experience and concerns of specific communities of interest. A nominating committee composed of two COMTA Commissioners and one person who does not serve on the Commission selects candidates for nomination. The Commission appoints the two Commissioners, and the COMTA Chair appoints the external member. The external member may not be an officer or professional staff member of any organization that provides financial support to COMTA or a member of the COMTA staff. No member of the Board of Directors or staff of any massage or esthetics trade association may serve on the Commission for Massage Therapy Accreditation.

### *Commission Structure*

The full Commission elects a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary, each for a two-year term. The Chair serves as the presiding officer of the Commission and the Executive Committee. Should the Chair vacate that position, the Chair's duties shall be assumed by the Vice-Chair. The Executive Committee shall be composed of the Chair, the Vice-Chair, and Secretary. The Executive Committee serves as the primary planning and agenda-setting body for the Commission. The Executive Committee, or the Chair when designated by the Executive Committee, will be responsible for supervising the COMTA Executive Director and monitoring the operation of the COMTA office. The Commission may

delegate decision-making power to the Executive Committee to decide particular issues arising under COMTA standards and policies. The Executive Committee does not have the authority to take specific accreditation decisions. The Executive Committee may take emergency actions to respond to situations not covered by existing Commission policies. The Executive Committee shall notify the full Commission of any such actions in a timely fashion. The Commission holds two face-to-face meetings annually and other electronically-mediated meetings as needed. All Commission meetings are closed. The Commission reserves the right to invite guests to provide consultation to the Commission as required. The Commission may have standing committees that are necessary to conduct the Commission's business. The Commission may establish special or appropriate ad hoc committees as needed.

#### *Staff*

The Commission hires an Executive Director to oversee daily operations and shall have authority to make and implement necessary rules and procedures to insure the effective and efficient operation of COMTA, subject to review by the Executive Committee and the Commission. The Executive Director shall be a non-voting ex officio member of the Executive Committee. The Executive Director or her/his designee shall be a non-voting ex officio member of all standing committees. The Executive Director hires staff to support the daily operations of the Commission.

### **IV. VISION, MISSION STATEMENT and VALUES**

#### *Vision*

All quality massage therapy/bodywork and esthetics institutions or programs are accredited by COMTA.

#### *Mission*

COMTA elevates and upholds standards of excellence in massage therapy/bodywork and esthetics education through specialized accreditation, benefiting students and schools, practitioners, and the public.

#### *Values*

1. COMTA is a dynamic organization dedicated to furthering the success of massage therapy and bodywork education, through ongoing dialogue with educators, practitioners and consumers.
2. COMTA, as a learning organization, values its relationships and dialogue in continuing to identify and reflect the existing and emerging educational trends and professional practice requirements for massage therapy and bodywork education.
3. COMTA acknowledges and supports the holistic and transformative nature of massage therapy and bodywork education.

### **V. SCOPE OF ACCREDITATION**

COMTA extends its services to institutions and programs that award postsecondary certificates, diplomas, or degrees in the practice of massage therapy and bodywork and esthetics/skin care. COMTA provides institutional accreditation for freestanding institutions of massage therapy and bodywork as well as esthetics/skin care. COMTA also accredits educational programs in massage therapy and bodywork or esthetics/skin care offered at other institutions. Where institutional accreditation in a country is not otherwise available, the institution must have the approval of the government agency responsible for the oversight of such institutions. National and/or state (or provincial) law will prevail when either or both conflict with COMTA standards, policies, procedures, guidelines, or decisions. However, when such laws result in educational offerings and services inferior to the minimums required under COMTA standards and policies, programs and institutions must agree to accept the COMTA standards and policies as a condition of accreditation.

### **VI. THE FUNCTION OF STANDARDS**

Standards serve a variety of functions. They provide a nationally-recognized measure against which

an institution or program may be evaluated. Therefore, the general public, employers, clients, government bodies, legislators, and students will know the criteria used to measure the institution or program's suitability for accreditation. Standards are used by both site team members and the Accrediting Commission to review and assess relevant materials submitted by the institution. Standards also serve as a target at which institutions may aim as they strive to improve the quality of their educational programs and services. The Commission periodically and systematically reviews and assesses the reliability and validity of its standards and criteria.

## **ACCREDITATION: COMTA's Responsibilities and Authority**

### **I. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The following requirements must be met before applying for accreditation. A school or program may not apply for COMTA accreditation unless there is a minimum of five (5) students enrolled in each program applying for accreditation status.

#### *Institutional Accreditation*

1. All programs offered by the institution must be massage therapy/bodywork or esthetics programs.
2. The institution must be legally organized and licensed by the appropriate state education and/or state licensing agency that authorizes the conduct of business in that state.
3. The institution must offer instruction at the postsecondary level.
4. The institution must offer at least one massage therapy or esthetics program that requires completion of a minimum of 600 clock hours of instruction.

#### *Programmatic Accreditation*

1. The program must be clearly identified as a professional massage therapy or esthetics educational program. Other professional education programs that include massage or skin care courses are not eligible for program accreditation.
2. A specific entity or department, organized to oversee the massage therapy or skin care program, must be responsible for the program.
3. Identifiable faculty and administrative staff with explicit authority must be assigned to and be responsible for the program.
4. The program must provide an organized plan of study of at least 600 clock hours in length.
5. The institution must offer a certificate, diploma or degree in massage therapy or esthetics to a body of students enrolled to receive such a credential.
6. The parent institution must demonstrate its financial commitment to the massage therapy and bodywork program or esthetics/skin care program by allocating enough financial support to enable all enrolled students to complete the program.
7. The program must be located in an institution that already has institutional accreditation from an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

### **II. STEPS IN INITIAL OR RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

1. **Application:** To begin the accreditation process, an institution submits an application fee and a letter of intent to apply. The institution/program will then complete the electronic application with supporting documentation. Staff will evaluate this information to determine the institution's eligibility (See Appendix for Fee Schedule and Frequently Used Forms). A program or institution officially begins the self-study process when its application is determined to be current, complete, accurate, and having fulfilled all substantive application requirements. If these requirements have not been satisfied within twelve (12) months following the receipt of the application, that application is void. Application fees are non-refundable according to specific Commission provisions as noted in the Fee Schedule. Renewing programs and institutions must apply for renewal 12 to 18 months before their current approval expires.
2. **Required Online Accreditation Training:** After an institution is determined to be eligible and before submission of the Self-Study Report (SSR), applicants must complete an online

accreditation training course. One person per campus (main and branch) must register and complete the training. Institutions/programs may do so before submitting an application, but must submit the application within one (1) year of training course completion. Programmatic applicants must complete COMTA 101 only and Institutional applicants must complete COMTA 101 and COMTA 102. Applicants for renewal must complete the online training course(s) for updates on current requirements in the 12 to 18 month period before their current approval expires.

**3. Self-Study Report (SSR):** If eligible, the applicant institution/program is provided access to the online submission area to complete the SSR process. The process of completing the SSR provides the applicant an opportunity for self-evaluation and improvement in areas that need strengthening. The completed Self-Study Report will serve as the primary tool for evaluation of the institution/program by the site visit team and the Commission. Along with submission of the SSR, the institution must prepare for the site visit to be scheduled. The applicant institution/program must submit its SSR within nine months of the application acceptance, or the application becomes void, and the institution/program must reapply. Renewal applicants must submit their SSR no later than nine months before the expiration of their current accreditation. The Commission, or its designated agent, may extend this period for reason of documented exceptional circumstances at the institution or at COMTA. An extension of the deadline for SSR submission is subject to late fees of \$500 per 30-day extension at the discretion of the Commission. An accreditation site visit will not occur if COMTA staff determines that the SSR is incomplete and provides insufficient foundation for a successful visit and subsequent report by the site visit team. Such findings will be communicated to the applicant in writing, detailing areas requiring improvement and suggestions for making progress in these areas. Applicants may receive such suggestions until COMTA staff and the applicant are convinced the site visit is merited. Applicants may request a site visit, regardless of the recommendations of COMTA staff, and the Commission will comply. However, both parties (the applicant and COMTA) must recognize that the success of a site visit is dependent on the quality of the SSR. Copies of the current school catalog and other applicable publications must be submitted with the application and with the SSR when applying for accreditation. Catalog revisions must be in keeping with these guidelines. See the appendix and the COMTA website for a specific catalog requirement checklist.

**4. Site Visit:** Site visit teams will consist of at least three people. As team members will review the SSR materials and complete the document verification tasks for the institution/program before the site visit, the SSR must be complete before the actual visit. This step of the process is intended to verify as much as possible so the on-site reviewers may spend their time efficiently. Team members are responsible for specific standards about which they have expertise. The task of the site visit team is to verify the information contained in the SSR and observe in person. Although the team creates a report of its findings, site visit team members do not determine accreditation. All decisions are made by the Commission. Site visits may be delayed for no more than one accrediting cycle (six [6] months) following submission of the SSR. The Commission, or its designated agent, may extend this period for reason of documented exceptional circumstances at the institution or at COMTA. An applicant may request voluntary deferral for a maximum of one six (6) month period. A written explanation of the reasons for deferral must accompany the request. An institution or program engaging in an on-site review has voluntarily invited a group of peers to provide an assessment based on a visit to the school with representatives of staff, faculty, students, graduates and employers of graduates. The effectiveness of the review depends on the openness and preparedness of the school in responding to the areas of accreditation standards that the on-site evaluation team members are expected to verify as a part of the visit. The details related to preparation and qualifications of the evaluators are outlined in the Application materials. Site visits may be scheduled visits for accreditation, renewal of accreditation, or unannounced special visits. The applicant receives a completed peer review report following the site visit. The applicant has thirty (30) days to respond to the report, to correct any misinformation, or to provide additional documentation to clarify questions that will be submitted to the Commission for review.

**5. Report to the Commission:** Within two weeks following the site visit, the team submits its findings into a written report to the Commission. Before submission to the Commission, the staff reviews the report and provides feedback to the applicant institution/program seeking comments, corrections and additional information. The applicant is allowed at least 30 days for response to the report, unless the applicant requested a site visit date too close to the Commission meeting and agreed beforehand to have a shorter period for response.

**6. Commission Action:** The Commission meets a minimum of twice per year to take action on applications. Actions on applications for initial accreditation include accreditation, deferral, or denial of accreditation. Subsequent, ongoing actions of the Commission include renewal or continuance of accreditation, provisional accreditation, transfer of accreditation, probation, and revocation of accreditation. Actions available to the applicant and accredited institutions/programs include appeal of adverse actions, withdrawal of the application, or surrender of accredited status.

**7. Reaccreditation Procedures:** The reaccreditation process provides an opportunity for accredited institutions/programs to reassess the quality of their educational and administrative methods periodically. Because reaccreditation requires participation in the self-study process, institutions/programs can reevaluate current practices and contemplate new directions. The required site visit provides further opportunity for the institution/program to refine its current procedures further. The process of reaccreditation will be familiar to accredited institutions/programs as it mirrors the accreditation process, including the application, completion of online training, the self-study report, and the site visit.

### III. COMMISSION ACTIONS

The Commission may enact any of the following measures. These actions are assigned based on the extent to which a program or institution complies with the accreditation standards. No adverse action taken by the Commission is final until the appeals process has been exhausted. See section VI, Publication of Commission Actions, for details regarding how these statuses are communicated to appropriate parties.

1. **Accreditation:** Confirmation that a program or institution meets or exceeds the accreditation standards. Accreditation may be granted to new applicants for seven (7) years. Conditional accreditation may be granted, provided deviations from full compliance do not immediately threaten the ability to deliver the educational program or to operate legally. When granting conditional accreditation, the Commission must stipulate a period in which the program or institution must demonstrate compliance with all accreditation standards. The period for conditional accreditation will be in accordance with the overall timeline for meeting compliance as required by the U.S. Secretary of Education recognition requirements noted here:
  - a. The timeline is based on the length of the program in question, or the longest program offered by the institution. If the program is less than one year in length, the period shall not exceed twelve (12) months.
  - b. If the program is longer than one year but less than two years, the period shall not exceed eighteen (18) months.
  - c. The maximum length of time for programs of two years or longer shall not exceed two years (24 months).

All statuses that recognize accreditation with some areas needing improvement for full compliance (conditional accreditation, probation, or deferral of re-accreditation) contribute to the timeline together. The time period begins when the institution or program is notified by the Commission that there is an area of non-compliance. If compliance is not demonstrated in the allotted time frame, the Commission will take immediate action unless there is good cause to extend the period for achieving compliance. Extensions for good cause will be limited to situations when the institution or program has complied with all directives from the Commission, is showing progress toward full compliance and the provision of additional time is required to see the outcomes of the changes already made. Generally, extensions will not exceed twelve (12) months beyond the required timeline.

2. **Continuation or Renewal of Accreditation (Reaccreditation):** Confirmation upon reevaluation of an accredited program or institution that continues to meet or exceed the accreditation standards. Continuance or renewal of accreditation may be granted for a period of seven (7) years. Conditional accreditation may be granted under the circumstances and conditions noted above.
3. **Provisional Accreditation:** A continuation of a previous grant of accreditation for a limited period, during which COMTA evaluates new information that may affect the institution's/program's ability to stay in compliance with COMTA standards. Provisional accreditation begins when COMTA receives written notification of the anticipated change and ends when the institution/program receives written notification from COMTA of the Commission's action. A change in the control of an accredited institution/program automatically triggers provisional accreditation. Provisional accreditation is granted by either the COMTA Chair or Executive Director upon initial notification of the change of control, and is subject to Commission ratification within 30 days. The Commission may modify the terms or reject the provisional accreditation. Maintenance of provisional accreditation is contingent upon an institution/program's following COMTA procedures and the completion of a site visit no later than six (6) months following the change in control. No Substantive Changes may be made during provisional accreditation.
4. **Transfer of Accreditation:** When the Commission grants provisional accreditation for a change of control, it must decide whether to transfer accreditation within seven (7) months following the change in control. If a complaint is filed before completion of the transfer of accreditation, the complaint must be resolved before completion of the transfer.
5. **Probation:** An action taken by the Commission when an accredited program or institution is no longer in compliance with the accreditation standards or policies, and the deficiency is severe enough to jeopardize that program's or institution's ability to provide quality education. Probation is a disciplinary action that may result in revocation. A program/institution may also be placed on probation for failure to meet any reporting deadlines or financial obligations or refusal of a program/institution to respond to or cooperate with the Commission's request for a special visit or report. Following a decision to place an institution or program on probation, the Commission will notify the school, specifying the reason for the probation and the conditions and timeframes that need to be met before removing the probation. During the probationary period, the program or institution is required to change its operation to comply with accreditation standards and policies. The Commission will require a written report addressing the concerns raised in the notification of probation and may require an additional site visit. While the program or institution is still recognized and listed as accredited COMTA shall notify the U.S. Department of Education, state, provincial, or national regulatory authorities, and other accreditation agencies of the program's or institution's status as appropriate. The Commission will determine period of probation, not to exceed twelve (12) months if the program is less than one (1) year in length; or eighteen (18) months, if the program is one (1) year or more in length. If conditional accreditation or deferral status was issued before the probation for the same areas of non-compliance, the timeline for probation must take into account the time period allowed in prior statuses to calculate the deadline for compliance. Failure to comply with accreditation standards or policies within the probationary period shall lead to revocation of accreditation. COMTA shall retain the ability to revoke accreditation without placing a program or institution on probation. As part of its decision to invoke probation, COMTA will specify the means that will be used to determine whether the program or institution has come into compliance with applicable COMTA standards and policies. If these means include a fact-finding visit, the program or institution will be responsible for all expenses. A school placed on show cause or probation shall not make substantive changes during the period of show cause or probation order, without written authorization from the Commission. Institutions on probation may not apply for additional locations or credential changes without prior permission from COMTA, COMTA will have the power to amend the specification during the probationary period.
6. **Deferral of Accreditation:** Deferral is not considered an accreditation action. It is a decision to delay taking an accreditation action. When the following conditions are met, Deferral is appropriate:
  - d. (a) an applicant program or institution is not in compliance with all of the accreditation

- standards,
- e. (b) the Commission believes the applicant will be able to meet the standards within a reasonable period, and
  - f. (c) deviations from compliance are of an order that does not justify accreditation on a conditional basis.

The Commission will require an interim report and may require an additional site visit before making an accreditation decision. A program or institution may be deferred for a maximum of two six-month periods. The time periods for meeting compliance for conditional accreditation apply if the deferral is regarding the decision to renew the grant of accreditation. Once the Commission makes the renewal decision, the period of deferral is included in calculating the total period for grant of accreditation not to exceed seven (7) years.

- 7. **Show Cause:** Show Cause is an action taken by the Commission when the accreditation of an institution is out of compliance and subject to revocation. The institution will be provided in writing with the alleged deficiencies, and the institution is requested to “show cause” why its accreditation should not be revoked. The COMTA Executive Director automatically issues a show cause action against a COMTA-accredited institution or program. The Commission reviews the material provided by the institution/program, and renders a decision regarding revocation. As part of its decision to invoke show cause, COMTA will specify the means that will be used to determine whether the program or institution has come into compliance with applicable COMTA standards and policies. The Commission review may include further evaluation including, but not limited to, a special site visit. If a fact-finding visit is required, the program or institution will be responsible for all expenses. COMTA has the power to amend the specification during the show cause period. A school placed on show cause or probation shall not make substantive changes during the period of show cause or probation order, without written authorization from the Commission. An Institution on show cause may not apply for additional locations or credential changes unless upon receipt prior permission. COMTA retains the ability to revoke accreditation without issuing a show cause action.
- 8. **Denial of Accreditation:** An action taken by the Commission when an applicant program or institution is not in compliance with the accreditation standards and the Commission deems the applicant to be unable to meet the standards without very substantial changes in its operations or organization. Notice of denial of accreditation or denial of continued accreditation must be sent to the program or institution with a statement of the reasons for the Commission's decision. COMTA will also inform the public of a program or institution's denial status and a summary of the reasons for the denial. The institution/program will be given an opportunity to provide official comment that COMTA will also make publicly available. Reapplication may be made no sooner than one year after the final decision of the Commission or Appeals Committee. All application and site visit fees and procedures, including submission of a new Self-Study Report, shall apply.
- 9. **Revocation of Accreditation:** An action taken by the Commission when an accredited program or institution is severely deficient in its compliance with the accreditation standards or policies.

Notice of revocation of accreditation must be sent to the program/institution outlining the reasons for the Commission's decision. The program or institution must surrender the accreditation certificate when accreditation is revoked. COMTA will also inform the public of a program or institution's revocation status and a summary of the reasons for the revocation. The institution/program has an opportunity to provide an official comment that COMTA will also make publicly available. Notification to the public, the USDE and appropriate state and accrediting agencies will be made in accordance with section VI, Publication of Commission Actions, of these policies.

#### IV. INSTITUTION/PROGRAM OPTIONS

Applicant and accredited institutions/programs may take the following actions regarding accreditation status.

- 1. **Appeal of Adverse Actions:** Institutions/programs may appeal denial or revocation of

- accreditation. Commission decisions may be appealed by the owner or Executive Director of an institution or by the manager of the approved program in a larger institution.
2. **Withdrawal of Application:** An applicant may withdraw from the accreditation process after applying, but must do so before an accreditation decision by the Commission. All fees once paid are non-refundable.
  3. **Surrender of Accredited Status:** An institution/program may voluntarily surrender its accredited status. No fees will be rebated, and the accreditation certificate must be surrendered.

## V. APPEALS PROCESS

Following the denial of accreditation or revocation of accreditation, a school has the right of appeal. On appeal, the institution or program has the burden of showing that the Commission's decision to deny or withdraw accreditation resulted from errors or omissions in the execution of the Commission's policies and procedures or that the Commission's decision was arbitrary, capricious and was not based on substantial evidence on the record. The following steps must be followed:

1. A written request for appeal must be made to COMTA within ten (10) calendar days of receiving the Commission's decision. All written materials are to be sent electronically to the Executive Director.
2. A pool of candidates with knowledge of accreditation standards, policies, procedures, and purposes, established by COMTA, serves as the source of members for an Appeals Committee, and may include former Commissioners and experienced Peer Reviewers. The COMTA Chair convenes an Appeals Committee composed of five (5) persons from a list of seven (7) provided to the school in advance within ten (10) calendar days of receipt of request for an appeal of the decision. If the school has sufficient reason to believe an appointed Appeals Committee member should not hear the appeal, it shall notify the COMTA Chair immediately.
3. The Appeals Committee shall include representatives in the following roles:
  - a. One public member;
  - b. One academic representative;
  - c. One administrator within the scope of COMTA approved institutions;
  - d. One educator within the scope of COMTA approved programs; and
  - e. One practitioner within the scope of COMTA approved programs.

The Committee members will receive orientation to their roles for the appeal process as well as updates on current Commission policies and procedures from the Chair and/or Executive Director. Committee members are subject to the COMTA Statement of Ethical Responsibility agreement and conflict of interest policies. The committee will not include any individuals who were current Commissioners at the time the adverse decision was enacted.

4. The appeal fee is submitted at the same time the institution/program provides written request for appeal.
 

The school provides a point-by-point written response to the Commission's decision within thirty (30) calendar days of the appeal request. All submissions must be in electronic format within the online submission area provided by the Commission. Presentation of materials during the hearing will be limited to those materials that were available to the Commission at the time the decision to deny or withdraw accreditation was made, or to materials that were submitted with the appellant's point-by-point written response within the thirty (30) days of appeal request.
5. The Appeal Committee will consider new evidence that was not available to the Commission at the time of the adverse action under the following circumstances only:
  - a. If the Commission's decision made its decision on the basis of issues to which the school did not have adequate opportunity to make its position known;  
*Or*
  - b. If relevant, existing facts were not presented to the Commission by the school because of a misunderstanding on the part of the school;  
*Or*
  - c. If the only remaining deficiency is related to finances, new information that is significant

and bears materially on the deficiency becomes available to the school after the adverse action. In this case, new information will only be allowed once and any determination made based on the new evidence is not subject to further appeal.

The Appeals Committee has access to the complete school file. The Appeals Committee shall set a date to hear the appeal within ninety (90) calendar days of receipt of the written statement from the school and payment of appeals fee.

6. The school/program may send a representative to the hearing to make an oral presentation. The school/program must state its intent to send a representative in the school's point-by-point written response. Oral presentation will be limited to forty-five (45) minutes total by the school representative and must be limited to the information already submitted in writing within thirty (30) days of appeal request.
7. The school has the right to the presence of counsel at its own expense. A transcript of the appeal proceedings may also be made at the school's expense. Notification of the presence of counsel and the desire to transcribe the proceedings must be done in the point-by-point written response. If a transcript is made, the school will provide a copy to the Appeals Committee at the school's expense. The Commission will provide a list of court reporters and contact information from which the institution may make arrangements for reporting and transcribing.
8. Following review of written materials and oral arguments, the Appeals Committee shall, by majority vote, decide the outcome of the appeals proceedings. Proceedings of the Appeals Committee shall be closed. The Appeals Committee shall prepare a summary report that outlines the evidence and rationale for the committee's decision. The report shall be provided to the Commission. A summary of the appeal decision will be created for public notice and communicated to the institution/program.
9. The Appeals Committee may:
  - a. Uphold the decision of the Commission.
  - b. Amend the decision of the Commission.
  - c. Reverse the decision of the Commission, thereby accrediting or re-accrediting the program. This action may be taken only based on evidence previously submitted to the Commission, and may be made on the basis of newly introduced materials.
  - d. Return the matter to the Commission for further action.

In cases where new evidence has been submitted, if the Appeals Committee determines the Commission's decision was incorrect, it shall return the matter to the Commission rather than taking action to accredit on the basis of new information.

**All decisions of the Appeals Committee are final.**

**Appeals Timeline:**

Day	Action	School/Program	Agency
0	Decision of accreditation denial or revocation received by school	X	
10	School notifies intent to appeal	X	
20	COMTA transmits list of seven (&) Appeal Committee members		X
30	School notifies COMTA of any objections to members	X	
30-40	COMTA chair appoints committee		X
40	School submits point-by-point response to COMTA School submits appeals fees (see Fee Schedule)	X	
90	Committee designates date for appeal hearing		X

## **VI. PUBLICATION OF COMMISSION ACTIONS**

Before Commission meetings, institutions and programs to be considered for accreditation action will be announced to the COMTA mailing list and on the website. Comments from third parties regarding the schools and programs will be accepted by the Chair of the Commission in writing, either via hard copy at the COMTA office, or emailed to [chair@comta.org](mailto:chair@comta.org), until two days before the meeting.

Institutions and programs will be notified in writing within thirty (30) days following any decision made by the Commission. Notification of Commission accreditation action including, but not limited to, the granting, continuation, or the placement or removal from probation status, will be made in writing within thirty (30) days to the United States Secretary of Education, appropriate state agencies, and the appropriate institutional or programmatic accreditation agencies. This notification requirement will also be effected when a program or institution either voluntarily surrenders COMTA accreditation or allows it to lapse. In cases of probation, denial, and revocation of accreditation, the agency reports the final action to the USDE and state agencies at the same time as notification of the school. COMTA announces these decisions on its website within 24 hours of the school or program receiving notification.

If there is a final decision to deny or revoke accreditation, the Commission will send a written summary of the reasons for that decision, together with the comments of the affected program or institution, to the United States Secretary of Education, appropriate state agencies, and the appropriate institutional or programmatic accreditation agencies, within sixty (60) days. A summary of the action taken and the affected party's response will be available to the public on the agency website.

Once each year, a summary report of Commission actions and an updated directory of currently approved schools will be made available to the accredited members of the Commission and sent to the United States Secretary of Education. The Commission will also send the Secretary any proposed changes to the Standards or Policies & Procedures that might affect the scope of recognition for COMTA or the compliance with the criteria for recognition by the Secretary.

## **VII. TITLE IV COMPLIANCE MONITORING**

Institutions participating in federal student aid programs (Title IV) are responsible for complying with those regulations and procedures. As a Title IV gatekeeper, COMTA is responsible for monitoring the quality of education and components of institutional operation considered to be indicators that a school is providing the education that students pay for when they enroll. COMTA includes certain standards in the accreditation process to ensure that measures of quality education are consistent with federal expectations; however, these standards are not to be considered exhaustive. When questions about an institution's compliance with Title IV arise during a site visit, peer reviewers are expected to document the issues in the team report and defer the questions to the Commission.

The Commission will provide the U.S. Secretary of Education copies of any requested documents pertaining to an institution's compliance with its Title IV HEA program responsibilities. If the Commission receives notification that an accredited institution is placed on a Heightened Cash Monitoring status or required to obtain a letter of credit, it will take action to monitor compliance as required. In addition, if the Commission has reason to believe that an institution is failing to meet its Title IV HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse, it will provide the Secretary with the name of the institution and the reason for the Commission's concerns.

## **VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Commission employs multiple methods to maintain confidentiality of information submitted during the accreditation process. Institutions/programs may redact information on documents submitted to the Commission that would personally identify students or employees of the school beyond that which is

necessary to confirm appropriate compliance, such as home addresses or Social Security numbers, unless specified as a component of the required documentation.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS**

### **I. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE**

COMTA requires prior notification of all changes that affect the educational and institutional integrity and that may affect the ability of the institution/program to maintain adherence to the accreditation standards. Substantive changes must be approved by COMTA before being included as part of the scope of accreditation granted the institution. Approval of Substantive Changes will not be retroactive. Failure to notify COMTA before substantive change may adversely affect the institution's accreditation status.

There is no specific limitation on the number of changes that may be made by an institution within an accreditation cycle. However, if more than two Substantive Changes are requested within the same year, the Commission will review the institution or program to determine if there are indications that the quality of education is not being maintained (data from annual reports, financial statements, high numbers of complaints, etc.) or if a mid-cycle visit is warranted.

Substantive changes include the following:

- A. Any change in the legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution.
- B. Changes in the established mission or objectives of the institution and/or program.
- C. Curriculum Change:
  1. Change of courses or programs offered representing a significant departure in either content or method of delivery, from those offered when the Commission last evaluated the institution, including adding Distance Education or changing from linear to modular scheduling of courses.
  2. A substantial change in the number of hours required for successful completion of a program. A substantial change is considered a change of 25% or greater in the number of hours of a specific program.
- D. Establishment of an additional location geographically or the addition of a program within a location that is geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.
- E. Addition of courses or programs at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution's current accreditation.
- F. A change from clock to credit hour.
- G. Change in leadership of the institution or program such as the CEO, President, Executive Director or Program Director. This refers to a change in the position of authority for making daily management decisions that affect the institution or program. Changes in leadership only apply to such persons as the CEO, President, or Executive Director. No other changes need to be submitted to the COMTA office.
- H. Change in the name or location of the institution or program.
- I. Addition of an eligible program. This refers to new programs in massage therapy and bodywork as well as adding a program in another subject area such as esthetics or skin care.
- J. Change of Type of Accreditation (programmatic or institutional)
- K. Acquisition of any other institution or any program or location of another institution.
- L. Addition of a permanent location at a site at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.
- M. Entering into a contract under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV HEA programs offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs (applicable only to those with institutional approval from COMTA).

#### **Procedures:**

Listed below are the notification procedures and Commission processes for addressing each of the thirteen (13) categories of substantive change within an organization or program.

## A. Change in Institutional Control

Accreditation does not automatically transfer with any change in the legal status or form of effective control of an institution. COMTA must be assured of the continuance of institutional integrity and the maintenance of educational standards if accreditation is to be successfully transferred. In the absence of any specific action by COMTA either to grant provisional accreditation, to transfer accreditation, or to reinstate accreditation, any change in the legal status or form of effective control results in the immediate and automatic discontinuation of accreditation.

### Definitions:

- **Change of Ownership:** Refers to the change in power within a proprietary institution. It is defined as, but not limited to, the following situations:
  1. Sale of the institution
  2. Transfer of controlling interest of stock of the institution or its parent corporation
  3. Merger of two or more institutions
  4. Transfer of controlling interest of stock to parent corporation
  5. Division into two or more institutions
  6. Transfer of assets or liabilities of institution to Parent Corporation or owners
  7. Change from profit to non-profit or to collective
- **Change of Control:** refers to change in power within a non-profit institution. It is defined as, but not limited to, the following situations:
  1. Change in fifty percent or more in the Board of Executive Directors' voting membership over a twelve (12) month period.
  2. Board of Directors' powers of control are nullified by any management Change from profit to non-profit or collective.
- **Provisional Accreditation:** A continuation of the institution's previous grant of accreditation for a limited period of time during which COMTA evaluates new information that may affect the program's ability to stay in compliance with COMTA standards. Provisional accreditation begins when COMTA receives written notification of an anticipated change in institutional control and ends when the program receives written notification from COMTA of the transfer of accreditation. Provisional accreditation is initially granted by the Commission upon initial notification of the change in institutional control within 30 days. Maintenance of provisional accreditation is contingent upon faithfully following COMTA procedures and the completion of a site visit no later than six (6) months following the change in institutional control.

### Procedure:

1. Notify COMTA Executive Director in writing at least thirty (30) days before a Change in Institutional Control (whether a change of ownership or control) for COMTA to grant Provisional Accreditation.
  - a. Provide a copy of the relevant Board of Executive Directors' meeting(s) minutes that set forth the conditions of the proposed change.
  - b. Provide name and address of proposed new leadership (owners/ Directors/Board members et alia).
2. Within fourteen (14) days after the Change in Institutional Control, submit to COMTA either a Change of Ownership (Proprietary) form (Appendix D.4) or a Change of Control (Non-Profit) form (Appendix D.5).
  - a. Submit the processing fee to COMTA with the appropriate document indicated above (See Fee Schedule).
3. Within forty-five (45) days after the Change in Institutional Control (Proprietary or Non-profit) submit a Change in Institutional Control—Attachments form (Appendix D.6).
  - a. The new owner or authorized official must provide evidence of maintaining all the standards and conditions of accreditation. Completion of online COMTA Accreditation training course(s) must be completed within six (6) months of the change of control.

- b. The institution must submit a report detailing all substantive changes made in the program or institution since the most recent accreditation review and planned for in the subsequent twelve (12) months. In those cases where COMTA accredits a program within a larger institution, this provision shall be limited to those institutional level changes that bear directly upon the capacity of said institution to support the accredited program. Substantive Changes may not be made during the period of provisional accreditation. Transfer of accreditation must be finalized and all proposed changes approved prior to implementation.
  - c. Copies of all legal documents of transfer of ownership or control must be submitted. For non-profit schools, include copies of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. This requirement is waived for public sector institutions.
  - d. Personnel forms (Appendix D.7 & D. 8) on all professional-level employees hired after the change in institutional control must be submitted. If a new Executive Director or person with leadership responsibility is hired, the employment agreement (including any agreed upon performance goals), curriculum vitae, and the job description must be submitted.
  - e. Submit copies of curriculum vitae of the new owners or board members.
  - f. School must provide a refund guarantee statement or a financial plan for teaching out the students currently enrolled if applicable.
  - g. Current financial status must be reported to the Commission using COMTA forms) or other forms or documents providing the same information. An external accountant must verify this information.
4. As soon as available, submit proof of state authorization under the new owner.
  5. Within six (6) months of the change of institutional control or ownership, a site visit will be scheduled for verification that the quality of the educational process is maintained through adherence to the accreditation standards and the policies of COMTA. The cost of the site visit is the responsibility of the institution and is included in the fee for the change.
  6. Transfer of Accreditation. When provisional accreditation is granted, the Commission must decide whether to transfer accreditation no later than at the first meeting of the Commission following the on-site visit. If a complaint is filed before completion of the transfer of accreditation, the complaint must be resolved before completion of the transfer. The transfer of accreditation granted is for the time period remaining on the accreditation awarded at the most recent accreditation awarded the institution.
  7. Reinstatement. In cases where failure to meet COMTA notification and other procedures regarding change in institutional control have resulted in the automatic discontinuation of accreditation, the Commission may grant that institution provisional accreditation based upon that institution's good faith efforts to comply with COMTA policies and procedures. The Commission may not waive Transfer of Accreditation for any reason.

#### Limitations and Exclusions

1. For the purposes of determining the locus of institutional control, married couples are viewed as a single entity. Additionally, closely-related family groups also shall be viewed as a single entity when it can be established the present and future shareholders actively participate in the management of the institution, or the stock is transferred to a close family member by will or operation of law upon the death of one of the shareholders.
2. Should a change in ownership or control be contingent on the transfer of COMTA accreditation, and should COMTA not approve that transfer, COMTA will not automatically reinstate the accreditation to the previous owner or Board of Directors. COMTA will consider a request for reinstatement based upon the provisions of the COMTA change in institutional control policy.
3. A change in institutional control occurs when there is a change of 50% or more in the Board of Directors of any private or non-profit institution within any twelve (12) month period, irrespective of continuity in the articles of incorporation of that institution. A change in institutional control also occurs through the adoption of any management agreement that has a nullifying effect on the Board's powers of control over the institution.
4. A change in institutional control occurs when, in the absence of a majority owner, there is a transfer of 50% or more of the outstanding stock since the previous accreditation, irrespective

of the size of individual holdings.

5. A change in institutional control occurs when there is a dilution of stock that results in a majority owner having 50% or less of the outstanding stock.

#### **B. Change in the Established Mission or Objectives of the Institution**

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the change within sixty (60) days and articulate how this change will affect the quality of the educational program and specifically the integrity of the accreditation status of the institution.
2. Include in your notification how this change will affect the strategic planning and direction of your institution.
3. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
4. COMTA will review materials and render decision regarding approval at its next meeting.

#### **C. Curriculum Change**

Addition of courses or changes to programs that represent a significant departure in either content or method of delivery from those offered when the agency last evaluated the institution, or a substantial increase in the number of hours required for successful completion of a program.

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the proposed changes and their relationship to the program elements in place as part of the most recent accreditation evaluation.
2. Submit the Curriculum Change Form with required details including:
  - A - Specify how these courses, programs and/or hours relate to the institutions mission and objectives.
  - B - Specify any changes to method of delivery and how the criteria for Standard II will be met by the new methods.
  - C - If the changes affect the Competency Chart, complete an updated chart and submit revised syllabi for all courses in the program.
  - D - Identify the instructional staff hired to meet the additional requirements and submit the COMTA Instructional Staff forms for each instructor (Appendix D.7) and the job description for each proposed instructor specifically identifying the qualifications and expectations of each position.
  - E - Identify the process the institution used in determining the need for this expansion of programming, courses and/or hours.
3. To add a distance education course(s), you must complete the Application for Addition of Distance Education, including demonstration of compliance with Accreditation Standard X and a virtual site visit as noted.
4. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
5. COMTA will render an approval decision based on the information provided at its next meeting.

#### **D. Additional Campuses (Branch or Auxiliary Classroom)**

Additional campus locations may be opened under specific conditions and procedures outlined in this section. COMTA's primary concern is the capability of the institution to demonstrate the planning, financial, and administrative resources necessary for ensuring continuing compliance with the COMTA standards and policies. An institution applying for the addition of a branch must be prepared to administer all aspects of the operation as a fully accredited extension of the main campus or program at the main campus effective the first day of approval. The failure of a branch to be in full compliance is a direct reflection on the main campus and will call into question the accreditation status of the institution. An auxiliary classroom must be located within reasonable and customary distance of the main campus or branch it supports, and it must provide evidence of the distance being reasonable and customary for the school's geographic location.

1. The COMTA-approved institution may not advertise, enroll, or teach at the proposed branch before receiving written COMTA interim approval.
2. The proposed branch may be a start-up at a new location or the acquisition of a

- separate institution.
3. After receiving initial accreditation by COMTA, institutions may not apply to add a new branch or auxiliary classroom until one (1) year from the grant of initial accreditation.
  4. After a change in institutional control, institutions may not apply to add a new branch or auxiliary classroom until one (1) year from the change in institutional control and until the transfer of accreditation has been approved by COMTA.
  5. Institutions involved in the reaccreditation process may not submit request for approval of additional external locations following the due date of the Self Study Report, and before a final Commission decision on the institution as represented in the SSR. Exception maybe made by a vote of the Commission.
  6. An institution under any restrictive or adverse action by the Commission, including deferral, denial, probation, or withdrawal may not apply for additional locations unless prior permission from COMTA is received.
  7. An institution whose current grant of accreditation is three (3) years or more may make application to establish a maximum of one (1) branch and three (3) auxiliary classrooms in any given twelve (12) month period. Exception may be made by a vote of the Commission.

*Process:*

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the intent to open a branch campus or auxiliary classroom before initiating classes.
2. Complete the Branch Campus Application (Appendix D.9) or Auxiliary Classroom Application (Appendix D.10); submit fee and supplemental information and documentation.
3. COMTA will review documentation and provide interim approval. Interim approval must be granted before the beginning of classes.
4. The institution will be required to submit a Self-Study Report for the branch or auxiliary classroom location where at least 50% of the program is being offered, within three (3) months from the start of classes at the new site. A due date will be provided when the Commission notifies the school of interim approval status. The report should address any areas applicable, with the understanding that some Standards will not be evidenced yet due to the lack of history at the location.
5. A site visit of one (1) or two (2) days and one (1) or two (2) persons will be conducted within six (6) months of the start of classes of the branch or program within the new location, offering at least 50% of a program. The institution and the Commission will receive a copy of the team report and the institution will have an opportunity to respond to the report. The Commission will review the team report and the institution's response to the team report at its next regularly scheduled meeting and make a final decision regarding the approval of the new site. The length of accreditation will coincide with the current term of accreditation of the main campus.
6. The Executive Director will review and make determination regarding institutions requesting approval of an auxiliary classroom that provides less than 50% of the program offered at the main campus.

**E. Credential Change**

Addition of courses or programs at a degree or credential level different than that which is included in the institution's current accreditation. This is a two-step process with permission required prior to offering the degree program, and follow-up verification after a specified amount of time has passed.

Step 1:

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the proposed change and the evidence the institution has the recognition of the appropriate jurisdictional authority to administer the program and provide the credential proposed.
2. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
3. All documents should be sent electronically. Upon receipt of the appropriate fee and notification of the institution's intent to add a program, an area for submission of further documentation will be made available in the online submission system.
4. Outline in writing how this change will impact on the other program(s) within the institution that is part of the current original accreditation action.

5. An institution under any restrictive or adverse action by the Accrediting Commission, including deferral, denial, probation, show cause, or withdrawal, may not apply for credential change unless prior permission from COMTA has been received.
6. Submit all supporting documents
7. COMTA will render a decision regarding interim approval based on information at its next scheduled meeting.

Step 2:

After the degree program has been in operation for at least six (6) months and no longer than twelve (12) months, compliance with the COMTA Standards must be verified.

1. All documents should be sent electronically. Upon receipt of the appropriate fee and notification of the institution's intent to add a program, an area for submission of further documentation will be made available in the online submission system.
2. Complete a Self-Study Report with all answers and exhibits focused on the program being considered for accreditation,
3. A Peer Review and site visit will be conducted to verify compliance with the Standards and in particular the presence of a library appropriate for degree level instruction. A report from the visit will be provided to the school for response.
4. The program SSR, report from site visit and response from the school will be evaluated by the Commission at the next regular meeting.

**F. Change from clock to credit hour**

1. Provide the conversion used for both lecture and lab and externship courses.
2. Submit the appropriate fee within 30 days (See Fee Schedule).
3. COMTA will render a decision regarding approval based on information provided at its next scheduled meeting.
4. If institutionally accredited and COMTA serves gatekeeper functions for Title IV funding, submit FSA approval that clock to credit hour conversions are correctly measured and financial aid calculations are accurately applied.

**G. Leadership change**

A change in leadership of the institution or program such as the CEO, President or Executive Director. This refers to a change in the position of authority for making daily management decisions that affect the institution or program. **Changes in leadership only apply to the CEO, President, or Executive Director. Other changes need not be submitted to the COMTA office except for the purpose of updating our records regarding the appropriate contact at the institution.**

1. Notify COMTA in writing within forty-five (45) days after the change by submitting a copy of the curriculum vitae of the new leader. Include an employment contract with any agreed upon goals. Also submit Appendix D.8 and a current job description.
2. COMTA Executive Director or Chair will acknowledge receipt of notification and report change to the Commission at its next scheduled meeting.

**H. Change in name or location of the institution**

1. For a name change: provide the legal documentation of the change including copies of the changes reflected in the by-laws of the corporation or similar documents.
2. For a change of location: notify COMTA before the move and include a detailed floor plan drawing outlining the location of classrooms, administrative offices, library, and other facilities. Also include the lease once executed and jurisdictional approval for the use of the space. COMTA must confirm the space is appropriate to support the ongoing adherence to the standards and maintaining the quality of education within the facility. A limited site visit is required within six (6) months of the start of classes at the new location and applies to all changes in location including main campus and branches.
3. Submit the appropriate fee within 30 days of changes. (See Fee Schedule).
4. COMTA will render a decision regarding approval based on information provided at its

next scheduled meeting.

#### **I. Addition of an eligible program**

Addition of programs that are distinct from those offered when the agency last evaluated the institution, or a program in a new subject area not previously evaluated by the agency. This refers to any program that an institution intends to include in institutional approval for Title IV funding after receiving COMTA accreditation, unless the program is a degree (see guideline E for Credential Change). This is a two-step process with permission required before offering the program, and follow-up verification after a specified amount of time has passed.

Step 1:

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the proposed programs and their relationship to the institutional/program elements in place as part of the most recent accreditation evaluation.
2. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
3. All documents should be sent electronically. Upon receipt of the appropriate fee and notification of the institution's intent to add a program, an area for submission of further documentation will be made available in the online submission system)
4. Submit Additional Program Application with all supporting documents.
5. COMTA will render an interim approval decision based on the information provided at their next meeting.

Step 2:

After the new/additional program has been in operation for at least six (6) months and no longer than twelve (12) months, compliance with the COMTA Standards must be verified.

1. All documents should be sent electronically. Upon receipt of the appropriate fee and notification of the institution's intent to add a program, an area for submission of further documentation will be made available in the online submission system.
2. Complete a Self-Study Report with all answers and exhibits focused on the program being considered for accreditation,
3. A Peer Review and site-visit will be conducted if the program is in a new subject area (such as esthetics/skin care at a school where massage has been approved previously). A report from the visit will be provided to the school for response. In cases when a visit is not applicable, a summary report will be created based on the documentation provided in the SSR.
4. The program SSR, summary or report from Site Visit and response from the school will be evaluated by the Commission at the next regular meeting.

#### **J. Change of Type of Accreditation**

From Institutional to Programmatic:

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the change.
2. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
3. Submit (1) a copy of the approval from the new institutional accrediting agency, (2) evidence that the USDE has approved the change on the ECAR, and (3) an updated catalog showing COMTA properly designated as programmatic approval.
4. COMTA will review materials and render a decision regarding approval at its next meeting.

From Programmatic to Institutional:

1. Notify COMTA in writing of the change.
2. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).
3. All documents should be sent electronically. Upon receipt of the appropriate fee and notification of the institution's intent to change to institutional accreditation, an area for submission of further documentation will be made available in the online submission system).
4. Complete an abbreviated Self-Study Report that addresses the areas of the Standards pertaining to institutions versus programs. For most schools, this will be focused on Standards

XI, XII, XIII, XIV, and XV if applicable. (A small number of schools will not need to complete this SSR as they were already evaluated on all the Standards as they apply to institutions. Consult with COMTA staff to determine if this applies for a particular program).

5. A limited peer review and site visit will be conducted to verify management, financial and administrative capacity. A report from the visit will be provided to the school for response.
6. The program SSR, report from site visit, and response from the school will be evaluated by the Commission at its next regular meeting.

#### **K. Acquisition of other institution or program**

The acquisition of any other institution or any program or location of another institution is subject to approval by COMTA before being considered part of the grant of accreditation. If the institution to be acquired is already accredited by COMTA, follow the procedures for Change in Institutional Control. For acquisition of a location that will be considered a branch of an existing COMTA accredited main campus, follow the procedure for adding a branch campus. If the acquired institution will be an independent main campus, the initial accreditation process must be followed.

#### **L. Addition of teach-out location**

The addition of a permanent location at a site at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study. Only students included in the teach-out may attend this location before COMTA interim approval as a branch. Advertising and new enrollment for the branch may not commence until interim approval has been granted. The procedure for adding a branch location applies, with the following additional requirement:

1. Submit the agreement with the closing institution detailing the expected time required to complete the teach-out of existing students. Explain how this timeline relates to the intended start date for this location to be considered a branch of the COMTA approved school.

#### **M. Contract with non-Title IV entity**

This applies only to those institutions that use approval from COMTA for Title IV eligibility entering into a contract under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEA programs offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs. Students may not receive Title IV funding for courses delivered by entities not certified to participate, even if the curriculum is approved at the institutional level.

1. Proposed contract must be submitted to COMTA before being finalized. A letter of explanation that details what aspect of the program will be delivered by the external entity should be included.
2. Submit the appropriate fee (See Fee Schedule).

The Executive Director and/or Chair will review the contract and determine if further documentation is required. A decision of approval will be made by the Commission at the next regular meeting. The contract may only be finalized following approval.

## **II. ONGOING COMPLIANCE - ANNUAL REPORT, FINANCIAL REPORT, AND SUSTAINING FEES**

Ongoing compliance with *COMTA Accreditation Standards and Policies & Procedures* is monitored and maintained through completion of Annual Reports, Financial Reports and payment of sustaining fees.

An Annual Report from accredited and endorsed institutions/programs is required to report enrollment data, completion and placement data, and continued *compliance with all Standards for Accreditation*. Annual reports are due on February 1 of each year. Within ninety (90) days of the reporting deadline, approval will be provided of the report or follow up action required in order to *demonstrate compliance with applicable Standards*.

Annual Reports also require data regarding MBLEx pass rates, non-substantive changes in curriculum and/or staffing, and changes in number of students enrolled during the year - increases or decreases of more than 20% from the year prior will be evaluated for further monitoring.

For members who are institutionally accredited, a Financial Report is due within six (6) months of the close of the institution's fiscal year. Financial reports include the audited or reviewed balance sheet and income statement for the completed fiscal year or financial compilations with disclosures if gross revenue is less than \$400,000. Please see Guidelines for Filing Financial Reports for additional information. Financial Reports also require data regarding changes in institutional revenue and increases or decreases in either value of more than 20% from the year prior will be evaluated for further monitoring. If the program/institution is approved for Distance Education, any change of greater than 50% will be reported to the USDE immediately.

Annual Sustaining Fees are due for all members who are institutionally accredited on March 1, all members who are programmatically accredited on May 1, and all schools with COMTA-Endorsed Curriculum on July 1 of each year. (See Fee Schedule. Newly accredited schools/programs will pay a prorated sustaining fee.)

### III. ADVERTISING

Only educational programs (or institutions) accredited by COMTA shall use the following statement and/or logo (that can be provided as an electronic file at the accredited school/program's request) in advertising and promotional materials to identify their accreditation status with COMTA:

"Program [or institution] accredited by the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA)."



1. If an institution includes both accredited and non-accredited programs, all advertising and promotional materials must clearly reflect this distinction.
2. This policy defines promotional material as including printed, broadcast, film and video, and electronic media.
3. When referencing accreditation, schools must include the full name, address and phone number for COMTA in their catalog.
4. Schools must comply with COMTA's Accreditation Standards relating to advertising (See Standard XIII).

If an accredited or non-accredited entity is found to be advertising incorrect or misleading information about its accreditation status, the contents of reports from site visits, or COMTA actions related to their accreditation status, the Commission will require the institution or program to publicly correct the information. From the point at which the inaccurate information is discovered until the issue is resolved, COMTA will post public notification of the issue on the COMTA website

### IV. CATALOG REQUIREMENTS

Before selecting a school or program, potential students are entitled to detailed information about the educational experience being offered. The catalog of a COMTA accredited institution will present an accurate description of the massage therapy or esthetics/skin care field and the education offered. The school catalog must be provided to students before the signing of an enrollment agreement. The school catalog must include the items listed on the Catalog Checklist. If the current catalog does not include all items, those excluded must be attached as catalog supplements.

Massage therapy or esthetics/skin care programs in larger institutions may not be able to publish all the required information in the catalog of the institution. Brochures and other program-specific publications may be used to ensure prospective students have all the required information

## **V. ACTIONS OF OTHER ACCREDITING COMMISSIONS OR STATE LICENSURE STATUS**

An accredited institution/program must notify COMTA in writing within thirty (30) days of any denial, suspension, revocation, probation or any other final or interim adverse action affecting the accreditation status of the institution or program. An accredited institution/program must notify COMTA in writing within thirty (30) days of any state agency attempting to withdraw authorization or licensure of the program or institution. Failure to comply shall be grounds for probation, revocation or conditioning of its grant of accreditation.

A new applicant with a pending or final adverse action by a State agency or other USDE-recognized accrediting agency may not be eligible for accreditation with COMTA. All applicants must be legally authorized to operate in their State. In cases when the State has taken adverse action, COMTA accreditation will not be granted. If the applicant is seeking programmatic approval from COMTA and the adverse action is with the primary institutional accrediting agency, the program cannot be accredited. If the applicant is seeking institutional accreditation and can demonstrate full compliance with the COMTA Standards more currently than the information upon which the adverse action was taken, the Commission may consider granting accreditation. Upon grant of accreditation, the Commission will notify the USDE within 30 days regarding the decision, including the explanation for why the Commission acted differently than the other recognized body

## **VI. SITE VISIT PEER REVIEW PROCESS**

An institution or program engaging in a site visit evaluation has voluntarily invited a group of peers to provide an assessment based on a visit to the school with representatives of staff, faculty, students, graduates, and employers of graduates. The effectiveness of the review depends on the openness and preparedness of the school in responding to the areas of the accreditation standards the site visit evaluation team members are expected to verify as part of the visit. The details related to preparation and the qualifications of the evaluators are outlined in materials provided by COMTA when the visit is scheduled. Site visits may be scheduled visits for accreditation, renewal of accreditation, or unannounced special visits.

## **VII. COMPLAINT PROCESS**

For complaints brought against institutions recognized or offering programs recognized by the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation, or against the Commission, its staff, or its volunteers, the process is as follows:

1. Jurisdiction
  - A. COMTA has jurisdiction over complaints directly related to COMTA standards, policies, and procedures.
  - B. This jurisdiction shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with U.S. Department of Education Criteria for Recognition. Institutions/programs are expected to make complaint forms available upon request. A Complaint Form is available on the COMTA website.
  - C. Parties initiating a complaint will be expected to have exhausted remedies available at their institution.

2. Purpose

To provide a means for COMTA to ascertain whether a recognized institution or program remains in compliance with COMTA standards, policies, and procedures, and to take appropriate action under COMTA policies. Within that context, the complaint process serves the purposes stated below.

- A. To provide a forum for the aggrieved party and for the responding program to clarify what occurred and reach a mutually agreed upon resolution.
- B. To provide a process by which all parties concerned will have an opportunity to present information regarding the complaint.
- C. To allow thoughtful consideration of all information submitted.
- D. To investigate all aspects of what occurred, and based upon information gathered, to develop a recommendation to the Commission, the aggrieved party, and the responding school for resolution of the complaint.
- E. To provide a hearing procedure if a mutually agreed-upon resolution is not reached.

## VIII. TEACH-OUT POLICY

### **Rationale:**

Institutions and programs seek to ensure that students are afforded every opportunity to successfully complete their training, whether it is with another institution that has agreed to teach those students, by the institution itself, or through refunds paid to students so that they may continue their education elsewhere. Therefore, COMTA will work with the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the appropriate state and accrediting agencies to the extent feasible, to ensure that students receive reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charge.

A school that intends to close or that, in the Commission's judgment, lacks sufficient financial resources for the proper operation of the school or program and discharge of obligations to students may be required to submit a comprehensive teach-out plan. A Teach-Out Plan would include the intended procedure to follow in the event of dissolution of the school including a proposed Teach-Out Agreement.

Per USDE Regulations 602.24, effective July 1, 2020:

(1) The agency must require an institution it accredits to submit a teach-out plan as defined in 34 CFR 600.2 to the agency for approval upon the occurrence of any of the following events:

(i) For a nonprofit or proprietary institution, the Secretary notifies the agency of a determination by the institution's independent auditor expressing doubt about the institution's ability to operate as a going concern or indicating an adverse opinion or a finding of material weakness related to financial stability.

(ii) The agency acts to place the institution on probation or equivalent status.

(iii) The Secretary notifies the agency that the institution is participating in title IV, HEA programs under a provisional program participation agreement and the Secretary has required a teach-out plan as a condition of participation.

(2) The agency must require an institution it accredits or pre-accredits to submit a teach-out plan and, if practicable, teach-out agreements (as defined in 34 CFR 600.2) to the agency for approval upon the occurrence of any of the following events:

(i) The Secretary notifies the agency that it has placed the institution on the reimbursement payment method under 34 CFR 668.162(c) or the heightened cash monitoring payment method requiring the Secretary's review of the institution's supporting documentation under 34 CFR 668.162(d)(2).

(ii) The Secretary notifies the agency that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA.

(iii) The agency acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution.

(iv) The institution notifies the agency that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program, including if the location is being moved and is considered by the Secretary to be a closed school.

(v) A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the agency that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.

(3) The agency must evaluate the teach-out plan to ensure it includes a list of currently enrolled students, academic programs offered by the institution, and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach-out agreement with the institution.

(4) If the agency approves a teach-out plan that includes a program or institution that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, it must notify that accrediting agency of its approval.

(5) The agency may require an institution it accredits or pre-accredits to enter into a teach-out agreement as part of its teach-out plan.

(6) The agency must require a closing institution to include in its teach-out agreement—

(i) A complete list of students currently enrolled in each program at the institution and the program requirements each student has completed;

(ii) A plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on State refund policies;

(iii) A record retention plan to be provided to all enrolled students that delineates the final disposition of teach-out records (*e.g.*, student transcripts, billing, financial aid records);

(iv) Information on the number and types of credits the teach-out institution is willing to accept prior to the student's enrollment; and

(v) A clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.

(7) The agency must require an institution it accredits or pre-accredits that enters into a teach-out agreement, either on its own or at the request of the agency, to submit that teach-out agreement for approval. The agency may approve the teach-out agreement only if the agreement meets the requirements of 34 CFR 600.2 and this section, is consistent with applicable standards and regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students being served by ensuring that the teach-out institution—

(i) Has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, delivery modality, and

scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations; however, while an option via an alternate method of delivery may be made available to students, such an option is not sufficient unless an option via the same method of delivery as the original educational program is also provided;

(ii) Has the capacity to carry out its mission and meet all obligations to existing students; and

(iii) Demonstrates that it—

(A) Can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel for substantial distances or durations; and

(B) Will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

(8) Irrespective of any teach-out plan or signed teach-out agreement, the agency must not permit an institution to serve as a teach-out institution under the following conditions:

(i) The institution is subject to the conditions in paragraph (c)(1) or (2) of this section.

(ii) The institution is under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.

(9) The agency is permitted to waive requirements regarding the percentage of credits that must be earned by a student at the institution awarding the educational credential if the student is completing his or her program through a written teach-out agreement or transfer.

(10) The agency must require the institution to provide copies of all notifications from the institution related to the institution's closure or to teach-out options to ensure the information accurately represents students' ability to transfer credits and may require corrections.

(d) *Closed institution.* If an institution the agency accredits or preaccredits closes without a teach-out plan or agreement, the agency must work with the Department and the appropriate State agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

**Definitions:**

Teach-out Plan: A plan that details the timing and process for possible closure of the COMTA-accredited institution or program. It does not necessitate the institution make public this plan or arrive at a formal agreement with another institution. It is meant to assure COMTA that the institution has a plan for the appropriate teach-out of its students, should it be necessary. See Appendix D.20 for required approval form and minimum requirements.

Teach-out Agreement: A teach-out agreement is a legally binding contract between an institution or program that may terminate and another institution that provides for the education of students enrolled by the former. In its discretion, COMTA may direct an institution or program to provide a teach-out agreement as part of its submitted teach-out plan. An institution that enters into a teach-out agreement with any other institution, either on its own or at the discretion or request of COMTA or any other agency or authority, must submit that teach-out agreement to COMTA for approval. See Appendix D.21 for required approval form and minimum requirements.

## Teach-out Plan

Overall a teach-out plan must address and/or provide: (a) the institution's plan to teach out its own students; (b) an executed teach-out agreement with one or more institutions located in reasonable geographic proximity that currently offer programs similar to those offered at the closing institution and have agreed to conduct the teach-out; or (c) a description of how the tuition recovery fund or other means will be used to make student refunds (if applicable).

### Teach-out Plan Minimum Requirements:

1. The date of last classes scheduled and date of site or program closure.
2. A listing of all students enrolled, including name and their estimated graduation dates, as well as their standing in their programs of study (hours/credits earned) and any financial responsibilities (unearned tuition, refunds due or additional charges pending if tuition is not paid in full).
3. A description of how the tuition recovery fund (if applicable) or other means will be used to make student refunds (if applicable).
4. An explanation accompanied by appropriate supporting documentation and timelines of how the school will notify students in the event of closure, including notification of the students' rights and opportunities for teach-out, transfer and refunds.
5. A demonstration and description of how the delivery of training to students will not be materially disrupted and that obligations to students will be met in a specified timeframe. (This may or may not involve a Teach-Out Agreement with another institution.)
6. If applicable, the name of the proposed teach-out institution. If more than one institution will be utilized for different programs, please list information for all. Submit a *Teach Out Agreement Approval Form* (Appendix D.21) for each agreement.
  - a. If a self teach-out is proposed, please note.
7. If applicable, a brief statement of proposed teach-out institution's history and description of its current operations, including its faculty, facilities, equipment, and mission statement; and, other materials to evidence that the institution is stable, carries out its mission, meets all obligations to existing students, and is able to provide the necessary experience, resources and support services. Submit the official Agreement and the *Teach-Out Agreement Approval Form* (Appendix D.21).
  - a. If self teach-out is proposed, detail how stability and obligations to students will be maintained.
8. In the event of school closure, a description of how all student records, including educational, billing, accounting and financial aid records, will be maintained or disposed of in an accessible location and in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

### **Teach-out Agreements:**

If a COMTA-accredited school enters into a Teach-Out Agreement with another school (either as the closing school or the teach-out school), or if required by the Commission to submit a proposed Teach-Out Agreement as part of a Teach-Out Plan, the Agreement must be approved by the Commission **before** implementation.

As dictated by the USDE, COMTA will approve the teach-out agreement only if the agreement is between institutions that are accredited or pre-accredited by a recognized accrediting agency, is consistent with applicable standards and regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students by ensuring that:

1. The teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to:
  - a. Provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations; and
  - b. Remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students; and
2. The teach-out institution demonstrates that it can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances and that it will

provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

#### Teach-out Agreement Minimum Requirements

In addition to the previous USDE requirements, the following criteria will be considered in approving the Teach-out Agreement. *Appendix D.21 Teach-Out Agreement Approval Form* must be submitted with each Agreement.

1. Evidence to show that the teach-out institution is accredited in good standing by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
2. Evidence to show that the teach-out institution is appropriately licensed and in good standing with any applicable state or federal regulatory oversight agency.
3. The Teach-Out Agreement must stipulate how the teach-out school will provide for the equitable treatment of students.
4. The Teach-Out Agreement must stipulate that the teach-out school has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to meet the requirements herein and has the capacity to remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students. Submit supporting documentation as evidence, including:
  - a. A schedule of time allocation between the administration of the teach-out students' and existing students' education; and
  - b. A budget of projected income and expenses for the entire period of the teach-out, as determined by the last date of graduation, that shows income and expenses required for the proper operation of the teach-out.
5. The Teach-Out Agreement must stipulate that the teach-out school will provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations whether entirely or at one of its locations. Submit supporting documentation as evidence, including:
  - a. A list of all programs at the closing school and all programs offered at the teach-out institution in a side-by-side comparison;
  - b. A list of any staff or faculty being hired or retained temporarily for the purposes of the teach-out, the programs and courses taught by each, and information showing that each faculty member meets COMTA faculty qualification requirements; and
  - c. An explanation as to how the proposed teach-out institution would be capable of conducting a teach-out of the programs.
6. The Teach-Out Agreement must show that the teach-out school has the capacity to provide all students with all of the instruction and services for which the students originally contracted and paid but did not receive due to the closure of the school without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances. Submit supporting documentation as evidence, including:
  - a. A description of the location and type of facility where the student will be taught out, as well as any arrangements for the absorption or addition of sites;
  - b. An explanation as to the adequacy of the teach-out location's facilities and equipment and how it complies with COMTA Standard IV; and
  - c. A map detailing the distance between the closing school and the teach-out institution.
7. The Teach-Out Agreement must stipulate that the students will not incur additional charges to complete their originally contracted program, and any changes to their original program must be made through the execution of a new enrollment agreement.
8. The Teach-Out Agreement must include the maximum number of students that can be accepted from the closing school and their expected date of completion.
9. The Teach-Out Agreement includes description of the financial responsibilities of all parties,

including the assumption of any liability.

10. The Teach-Out Agreement must state whether, upon completion of the program, the student will receive a degree, diploma or certificate from the teach-out school, or whether the degree, diploma or certificate will be awarded by the closing school.
11. The Teach-Out Agreement must indicate whether students who had already enrolled but who had not yet started their course of study at the closing school, and whether students who are on leave of absence from the closing school, would be entitled to begin training or re-enroll at the teach-out school.
12. The agreement states that the closing institution will provide the teach-out institution with copies of the following records for the students being taught out: (a) Enrollment Agreements; (b) Financial Aid Transcripts; (c) Attendance Records; (d) Academic Transcripts; (e) Student Registration List; and (f) Student Account Records.
13. The Teach-Out Agreement must provide for placement services to students who complete their courses of study.
14. The Teach-Out Agreement must require that the teach-out school shall separately maintain records and document performance under accrediting standards for the students being taught-out.
15. The Teach-Out Agreement must provide for appropriate notification to the Commission and federal and state authorities.
16. The Teach-Out Agreement must comply with applicable federal and state law.

#### **Review and Approval Process**

The Teach-Out Plan and/or Agreement will be reviewed and, if it meets criteria described above, will be approved by the Executive Committee within 15 days of receipt. The institution or program will receive notification if the Teach-Out plan is not approved and an additional 15 days to provide additional information for follow-up review and approval. The Executive Committee will use Appendix D.20 Teach-Out Plan Approval Form and Appendix D.21 Teach-Out Agreement Approval Form, if applicable, as its criteria for review and approval.

The full Commission will be notified of the approval at its next regular meeting. If the Plan includes a Teach-Out Agreement with an institution accredited by another agency, notification of the approval will be sent from COMTA to the other agency.

#### **Closure without a Teach-Out Plan or Agreement**

In the event that a school closes without a Teach-Out Plan or Agreement, COMTA will work with the U.S. Department of Education and the appropriate state agency to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charge.

Owners and/or senior administrators who fail to comply with these regulations and provide an adequate teach-out plan/agreement to minimize the risk and hardships to its students may be subject to a review by the Commission for consideration of notification to financial aid authorities and/or may be subject to legal action by the state within which the institution was licensed.

COMTA-accredited institutions that enter into Teach-Out Agreements as a teach-out school with a closing school *without* prior approval by the Commission will be subject to disciplinary action, including but not limited to Probation or Revocation of Accreditation.