



Spring 2021 COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines **ATS Commission on Accrediting**

In March 2020 the ATS Board of Commissioners (Board) issued and then updated in June 2020 *COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines* for the current health crisis that: (a) waived residency requirements for all degree programs; (b) permitted schools without comprehensive distance education approval to deliver their programs through any distance education technologies that provide regular and substantive interaction; and (c) authorized Commission staff, in consultation with member schools and visiting committees, either to postpone scheduled accreditation visits or to conduct those visits virtually through interactive technologies. Any visit for initial accreditation or for reaffirmation conducted virtually required an in-person, follow-up visit when reasonable and safe to do so. Any postponed visit for reaffirmation also extended the period of accreditation accordingly. The March 2020 guidelines followed [guidance](#) issued to accrediting agencies by the US Department of Education (USDE) on March 17. The June 2020 update followed [updated guidance](#) issued by the USDE on May 15, which extended those flexibilities through December 31, 2020.

Based on new USDE [coronavirus-related guidelines](#) issued on December 11, 2020, the Board met via Zoom in regular session on February 1, 2021, and approved these *Spring 2021 COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines*. **They extend through June 2021 (or for 180 days after the current health crisis is no longer declared a national emergency)** the flexibilities regarding waivers for distance education approvals (item b above) and for virtual or postponed visits (item c above). Waivers for residency requirements for all degree programs (item a above) are no longer needed under the new [Standards of Accreditation](#), approved by the membership in June 2020, except for PhD programs, for which a residency waiver continues in effect for the duration of the pandemic. Commission staff will continue to consult with member schools, visiting committees, and the ATS Executive Director regarding whether to conduct spring 2021 visits in person, to postpone them (by up to one year), or to conduct those visits virtually through interactive technologies. Visits conducted virtually require an in-person, follow-up visit when reasonably safe and practicable to do so, which may be conducted by a staff member or a visiting committee member. The purpose is to confirm the presence of facilities viewed during the virtual site visit (as required by federal regulations). Schools and the Board should document any accreditation-related actions taken under these guidelines.

NOTE: Schools without comprehensive distance education approval that desire to offer at least half of a degree online *after* spring 2021 must submit by April 1, 2021, a petition for comprehensive distance education approval, which the Board of Commissioners will consider at its June 2021 meeting.