



**ABAI
ACCREDITATION
BOARD**



To: Accredited Program Coordinators and VCS Coordinators
From: ABAI Education Manager, Accreditation and VCS Boards
Date: April 1, 2020
RE: ABAI Accreditation and VCS Response to COVID-19

The ABAI Education Department has received several inquiries about compliance with accreditation and VCS policies and procedures considering the coronavirus (COVID-19). We want to share the following information on behalf of both the Accreditation and VCS Boards.

Online instruction: Programs **do not** need to obtain additional verification to move online. We ask on-campus programs to report their move to an online format [here](#). If your program was initially verified or accredited as an online program, no further action is needed. If an institution's instruction is entirely cancelled, in that the term has ended early, please email us directly as soon as possible.

Once the form is completed, we will operate under the assumption that online instruction will occur through August 31. Because the timeline of COVID-19 is unknown, the Boards will provide additional communication this summer should programs need to continue online instruction into September.

At this time, we will not update the VCS directory to reflect programs' temporary move to online instruction. Instead, we provided a notification above the directory and accredited program list. Following the pandemic, if a program chooses to remain an online program and not return to face-to-face instruction, further verification will be requested.

Change in grading systems: We understand several institutions may move from a commonly used letter-grade system (i.e., A, A-, B+, B, B-, etc.) to a pass/fail system (or other classification). Institutions may make this modification across the entire institution or allow programs and instructors to make modifications per their discretion. Several coordinators have raised concern about this modification in relation to the BACB's examination application requirements stating the submitted coursework must "reflect that you received a passing grade ("C" or better for graded courses) in each course." Therefore, the Boards recommend the following:

- Per the BACB's examination applications requirements, coordinators and departments should ensure that a "pass" (or other similar designation) equates to a "C" or better. Graduate programs that require a "B" or better, to pass a course, should carefully consider their options for students' final grades to allow students with a "C" the opportunity to have their coursework counted for BACB examination applications.
- ABAI has agreed that coordinators can email us a notification of their changed grading policy. The notification may be an electronically signed attestation or a copy of the university policy. Coordinators may submit the notification at the end of the term to allow programs enough time to evaluate their options. We kindly ask that the information includes a description of the change in grading system and the terms affected. Please note programs **do not** need to submit an entirely new VCS application for this temporary change grading systems.
- The BACB has indicated that they require a "passing grade" and will accept a "pass" grade from universities that have a pass/fail system. You do not need to submit the attestation to the BACB.



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Supervised Experience/Fieldwork: Several coordinators have asked ABAI and the BACB to share additional guidance and clarification as it relates to disruptions in supervised fieldwork. Please know that all decisions related to Supervised Fieldwork are under the management of the BACB and not ABAI. However, we have reached out to the BACB, with your questions from the listserv, to obtain additional information and their responses are below:

Questions submitted to the BACB:

The following questions have come up on the listserv:

1. When the practicum placement is shut down for half the students but not for the other half, how should programs manage the hourly requirement for the students?
2. Is there further clarification of how the accrual of direct hours can be accomplished?
3. What should programs do differently if they cannot get enough observations per month?
4. Could coordinators seek confirmation of their proposed deviations now, in advance? Or, at least confirmation of their documentation systems? This is in reference to the following section in the BACB's March 18, COVID-19 update: "In special circumstances, however, we have a compassionate-exception appeals process in which reasonable deviations that still meet the intent of our requirements may be accepted. This process may include greater leniency around specific requirements that involve interactions with clients (e.g., number of trainee- or RBT-client observations, minimum number of experience hours in a month)"

BACB's response to the above questions:

We would refer them back to the [BACB's COVID-19 announcement page](#). It includes guidance regarding experience and fieldwork hours (I have copied the relevant section below as well). As mentioned in the post, in situations where clients are not available, the supervisors should be keeping records of the steps that they took to try and meet the intent of those requirements if they aren't able to meet the requirement exactly. However, most of our experience/fieldwork requirements are purposefully flexible, so they should be able to make modifications that work within their system. As a clarification on question #2 above, our experience/fieldwork standards do not require "direct hours." Rather, there is a limit on hours that only involve implementing client programming, so it is possible for trainees to be doing all unrestricted hours right now.

"Experience, Fieldwork, and Supervision – for Trainees, RBTs, and BCaBAs

Our certification requirements were developed to provide flexibility in how they are met across a variety of conditions. In special circumstances, however, we have a compassionate-exception appeals process in which reasonable deviations that still meet the intent of our requirements may be accepted. This process may include greater leniency around specific requirements that involve interactions with clients (e.g., number of trainee- or RBT-client observations, minimum number of experience hours in a month). It is particularly important that you keep detailed documentation in the event you are subject to a BACB-requirements audit. That documentation should include information about how the pandemic impacted your services, supervision, etc., and the steps you took to try to meet the requirements. Finally, we encourage every BACB certificant and trainee to seek guidance from their supervisors about how supervision and service delivery might be impacted in the weeks ahead."

General VCS Updates: Our team is working diligently to ensure programs' 5th edition applications are processed in a timely manner. March renewals have been extended to an April 30 deadline. Programs with a June renewal deadline will be evaluated later.



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As a reminder, renewal and new application fees are effective January 1, 2020. The payment process is a new system and our team is working through some system-wide updates. Please **do not** pay application fees for renewals or applications that were submitted in 2019. We will notify programs if payment is needed at the time of our application review.

Accreditation Updates: The following information is for ABAI accredited programs; however, the recommendations for research projects may be applicable to all programs. We have agreed that accreditation annual reports may be submitted by April 30. And, programs seeking re-accreditation this year may also submit their self-study application by April 30. We will issue invoices over the next two weeks.

We understand nearly all research projects have been affected by the COVID-19. The Accreditation Board suggests working with your department to decide what kind of flexibility there may be to your program's standards for master's theses and doctoral dissertations. We should remind you that the Accreditation Board's requirements are broadly defined:

The purpose of a **thesis or equivalent** is "To develop competence in defining a research problem, designing a method to address the problem, and conducting and reporting an investigation that carries out the method to conclusion."

The purpose of a **dissertation** is "To demonstrate independent scholarship in the context of an investigation that produces an original contribution to the basic, applied, or conceptual analysis of behavior."

In light of these requirements and the current crisis:

- We suggest that programs allow students to complete the thesis or dissertation requirement in cases where the student was unable to complete their research project but still was able to collect enough data to write a reasonable report, draw at least preliminary conclusions, and include an appropriate discussion of the limitations of the research.
- Students with insufficient data may be advised to do an alternative project. Alternative projects may include:
 - a portfolio of behavior-change programs implemented with their clients/students in such a way as to measure behavior change and draw causal inferences
 - re-analyses of existing data in a way that yields new insights or information
 - stimulations and modeling that address significant issues in behavior analysis and have potential to advance experimentation or theoretical understanding of the issues

We want to assure you that your health and wellbeing are top priority of ABAI. Our Boards will continue to monitor the situation and provided updates and extensions as needed. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance.

Thank you,

Jenna Mrljak, Ph.D., BCBA, Education Manager

Michael Dorsey, Ph.D., LABA, BCBA-D, VCS Board Coordinator

Michael Perone, Ph.D., Accreditation Board Coordinator