

Learning About the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC)

By Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, NCC, LPC, NAADAC President

In my current roles as NAADAC President and college addiction counselor educator, I am frequently questioned about the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC) of which I am a Commissioner. As such, I have compiled some basic FAQs to share in the hopes of clarifying what NASAC is, what it does, and why NASAC accreditation is important for college and university addiction studies programs.



What is NASAC?

The National Addiction Accreditation Studies Commission (NASAC) is an academic accreditation organization for higher education addiction studies programs. It is the only accrediting body that

represents addiction-focused educators and practitioners. It is also the only discipline-specific accrediting body that accredits all levels of higher education addiction studies programs, from Associate Degree program to Doctoral Degree programs.

What is the history of NASAC?

In 2010, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and its Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) held a panel summit of expert stakeholders tasked with developing national educational standards for college and university addiction studies education programs. The standards were to be based on SAMHSA's Technical Assistance Publication (TAP) 21, *Addiction Counseling Competencies: The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes of Professional Practice*.

At the conclusion of the summit, SAMSHA/CSAT encouraged the two primary groups representing academic educators and counselors, the International Coalition for Addiction Studies Education (INCASE) and NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, to jointly develop and implement a single accreditation body to assess and accredit addiction studies programs at regionally-accredited colleges and universities nationally.

What levels of addiction education does NASAC accredit?

NASAC accredits Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees addiction studies programs at regionally-accredited colleges and universities. NASAC also accredits Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral level certificate programs at regionally-accredited colleges and universities.

Why is NASAC accreditation important?

- To meet the challenges facing the addiction profession, a major focus toward developing the addictions workforce is to improve the competencies of those entering and serving in the profession. NASAC

accreditation assures key stakeholders (students, legislators, future employers, and others) that a college or university's addiction studies program meets or exceeds all NASAC standards and TAP 21 curriculum competencies and its faculty members are experienced and appropriately credentialed.

- Some state licensing boards including the board in my home state of Arizona accept NASAC-accredited degrees as meeting academic requirements for licensing. Non-NASAC-accredited degrees must have each individual course reviewed and approved by the board. This is a distinct advantage for students.
- Potential employers can be assured that a graduate of a NASAC-accredited program has completed a high quality program that meets or exceeds national established standards.
- NASAC accreditation requires a college or university to provide their students with a nationally standardized curriculum that includes all of SAMHSA's TAP 21, *Addiction Counseling Competencies*. Competencies are the professional standards guiding addiction professionals and TAP 21 provides a comprehensive list of 123 competencies that all addiction counselors should master to do their work effectively.
- Nationwide standardization of addiction studies curriculum is vitally important to the future health of our profession. Currently addiction studies educational standards and counselor credentialing varies greatly from state to state and from university and university. Some states require as little education as a GED and 300 clock hours of seminar-type training for an independent level certification, while other states require as much as an addiction counseling specific master's degree to obtain an independent level license. NASAC has established a single set of academic expectations that meet national standards set by SAMHSA.
- NASAC accreditation standards can be used as guidance when developing or evaluating an addiction studies program at a college or university to make sure the program meets national standards. Its self-assessment allows colleges and universities to evaluate their program's goals, curriculum, strengths, and weaknesses.
- NASAC accreditation requires an institution of higher learning to commit to continuous quality improvement.

What are the steps to NASAC accreditation?

Step 1: Review NASAC Manual

Download the NASAC Manual from the NASAC website (www.nasacaccreditation.org) and review all aspects of the NASAC accreditation process.

Step 2: Complete and Return Application and Self-Study

Obtain a NASAC application and instructions from the NASAC website. The application requests verification of the college or university's regional accreditation information and information on the college or

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university's eligible degree program(s). For each program, the requested information includes: an overview; its mission and goals; a program self-assessment; a detailed review of its curriculum, including course descriptions, outlines, syllabi, and a TAP 21 course crosswalk; its educational modalities; and documentation of any practicum, internship, fieldwork, or field experience required. Programs are welcome to contact NASAC at any time with questions or for help with the application process. Once all of this material is complete, the application and supporting documents can be submitted by email, along with payment of the application fee.

Step 3: Peer Evaluation

Upon receipt of the completed application and fee, NASAC will select an evaluation team made up of three peers matched for expertise and relevant field experience from similar NASAC-accredited programs to review the application and self-study. The team may consult with the program's leadership, faculty, and/or staff and, if necessary, recommend an on-site evaluation. Upon completion, the evaluation team will make its recommendations to the NASAC Board of Commissioners.

Step 4: Decision by NASAC Board of Commissioners

Upon reviewing the evaluation team's written report and documentation, the NASAC Board of Commissioners will render one of the four accreditation decisions below and notify the institution by written notice:

- Full Accreditation for a period of seven years;
- Conditional Accreditation, requiring the program to submit a plan and timeline for specific program modifications, the submission of additional documentations, additional policies/procedures to be developed, or other relevant information, within three years;
- Denial of Accreditation; or
- The tabling of the application to allow for further development of the program, or submission of further documentation where indicated.

Institutions will have the opportunity to appeal any decision if there is disagreement with the Board's decision.

How do I get more information on NASAC?

For more information on NASAC, including full guidelines, accreditation details, benefits, student membership and more, please visit <http://nasacaccreditation.org>.

How do I contact NASAC?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding NASAC, please email info@nasacaccreditation.org.



In addition to serving as NAADAC's President, Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, NCC, LPC, serves on the Editorial Advisory Committee for Advances in Addiction & Recovery. While serving in many capacities for NAADAC through the years, Bowden also serves as Chair of the Addiction and Substance Use Disorder Program at Rio Salado College, consultant and subject matter expert for Ottawa University, a past-president of the International Coalition for Addiction Studies Education (INCASE), and as a steering committee member for SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Partners for Recovery, and the Higher Education

Accreditation and Competencies expert panel for SAMHSA/CSAT. Bowden was recognized by the Arizona Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors as Advocate of the Year for 2010, and by the American Counseling Association for the Counselor Educator Advocacy Award in 2013, the Fellow Award in 2014, Outstanding Addiction/Offender Professional Award in 2015, and most recently the California Association for Alcohol/Drug Educators' Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015.

and reliability are what grow confidence in a team. Having confidence does not mean having the lowest voice; instead, it means being calm enough not to have to raise your energy to that level of frenzy. There are going to be days that are tough; those are the days one needs to look for the person on their team who can build others up and motivate them to tackle the task at hand. You are that person as the leader of the team! Remember, your confidence can dwindle as well, so make sure you have folks to go to who will build you up and keep your morale at a high enough level to be able to support others. You are modeling to your team and they will take cues from you. Check yourself—if you are low on positive energy, seek support and re-fill.

Commitment and Consistency

Are you a person who does what you say you will do, when you say you will do it? Great leaders make commitments and then work to fulfill them! Great leaders motivate others through example by producing consistently high-quality work and encouraging others to do the same. Consistency, day in and day out, is a visual verification of the commitment you exhibit as a leader. If you promise something, or agree to something, keep your word. People will follow you if they know they can count on you.

Creativity and Quick Thinking

There are many times when a leader is faced with a decision that has to be made before all the information has been received. Being able to be creative and to draw upon on your life and work experiences to help form a decision is vital. Being a leader means taking the risk to do this and trust that the outcome will be positive, or if the outcome is not, to be able to reverse the decision and find a new creative solution.

Intuition

There is not always a road map to follow as a leader. Years of experience and mentoring helped to build your intuition—trust yourself to make good intuitive decisions. If you don't trust yourself—neither will others!

Ability to Inspire

When you are clear with your vision and your passion, others will be inspired to invest in your vision. People need to feel inspired to keep moving forward and working toward a goal, especially in the addiction and helping worlds! You inspire by setting goals and working towards them.

Being a leader is not accidental—it is a calculated decision that requires thought, planning, and patience. Take the time to read each nomination and ask yourself, is this the person who I want to lead me and my colleagues for the next few years...and if not, why not you?



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and has worked as an addiction professional for over 35 years. She has been a trainer in Domestic Violence/Anger Management and Conflict Resolution for over 25 years, as well as an international, national and state trainer in a variety of topics. Moreno Tuohy is also a curriculum writer in addiction screening and evaluation, counseling methods, conflict resolution, co-occurring disorders and medicated assisted treatment and recovery, and has written articles published in national and other trade magazines. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and is certified both nationally and in Washington State.