

MAERB Report

Spring 2015

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[The 2015 CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for Medical Assisting have been approved](#)

After a two-year process of review and feedback, revision and feedback, more review and feedback, public forums and feedback, the 2015 *CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Medical Assisting*, including Appendix B, the MAERB Core Curriculum, have been approved by CAAHEP at their March 20, 2015 meeting. They are now posted on the MAERB website, on the documents tab, and at the CAAHEP website. These *Standards and Guidelines* go into effect immediately, and visits under the new *Standards and Guidelines* will begin in 2017.

In addition to the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines*, you will find on the MAERB website two helpful resources for you: A version of the *Standards and Guidelines* with tracked changes (2015Standards, Tracked) and a chart (Implementation Chart) that outlines all of the changes for your records and includes a few preliminary details for implementation.

Just to summarize some of the implementation details, the following guidelines will be put into place:

1. **Standard III.b.1.b, Program Director Qualifications:** For new Program Directors, the 2015 *Standards* for Program Director Qualifications are effective immediately. Current Program Directors who do not hold a medical assisting credential will have two years to acquire a credential, and they will be informed by the MAERB office of the need to do so.

2. **Standard V.A.4, Reporting an Outcome:** MAERB will be working on a new policy and it will be put into place after the August 2015 meeting. Details will be communicated to the Program Directors at that time.
3. **Appendix B, MAERB Core Curriculum:** Program Directors will be expected to have implemented the new curriculum by fall 2016. The MAERB office will be sending out details in order to help the programs with reporting those changes.

The MAERB office will be publishing more resources for the CAAHEP accredited medical assisting programs to help them implement these new *Standards and Guidelines* in the late spring, so you will all be informed. For now, the MAERB recommends that you study the new *Standards and Guidelines*, along with the revised MAERB Core Curriculum, and two resources listed above in order to become familiar with them and to make your own plans for implementation.

We look forward to working with all of you on this journey to continue to improve medical assisting education. Thank you for all the help and feedback that you provided, and we will certainly be providing you with more information and support.

NEW Personnel Workbooks

With the introduction of the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines*, MAERB has developed new workbooks for the following personnel: Program Directors, Faculty/Instructional Staff, and Practicum Coordinators. MAERB is shifting from an Excel workbook to a Word Form. Outlined below is an overview of the changes as well as the implementation dates. Those resources are available on the MAERB website.

- The Program Director Workbook incorporates the changes in qualifications outlined in the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines*. New Program Directors as of March 31, 2015, will need to use this workbook.
- The Faculty Workbook incorporates the changes in wording that is found in the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines* and requires that the MAERB Core Curriculum domains must be identified and documented in reference to the faculty member's teaching load. The MAERB Office will be accepting the previous Faculty workbooks until May 1, 2015. Programs DO NOT need to submit new workbooks for faculty members whose documentation has already been submitted to the MAERB Office.
- The Practicum Coordinator Workbook incorporates the changes in wording that is found in the 2015 *Standards and Guidelines*. The MAERB Office will be accepting the previous Practicum Coordinator workbooks until May 1, 2015. Programs DO NOT need to submit new workbooks for practicum coordinators whose documentation has already been submitted to the MAERB Office.

Site Visit Schedule Change: General Announcement and Information

Over 75% of the CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs have been informed by email that the MAERB is changing its ten-year cycle of visits in order to equalize the number of visits. If the site visit for your program has been affected you have already been notified through email. These changes will take place between 2018 and 2024. Outlined below is the rationale and process.

At the February 2015 meeting, the MAERB members approved a shift to equalize the number of programs scheduled per year for site visits; this shift will have a one-time effect on the time period

between the program's last site visit and the next scheduled site visit. This shift will affect the majority, approximately 75%, of CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs.

Currently, CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs undergoing continuing accreditation are visited every 9 ½ years. Over the next ten-year cycle, there is a great variation in the number of projected site visits scheduled per year: for example, in 2019, there are currently only 21 site visits scheduled, while there are 116 site visits projected for 2024. This disparity affects the programs, the site surveyors, the MAERB members, and the resources of the MAERB office. In light of that disparity, the MAERB office will be shifting the projected schedule in order to best serve the programs.

Outlined below is a description of the changes for programs undergoing the continuing accreditation process:

- Programs that were visited in fall 2014 and that are recommended and approved for continuing accreditation will be assigned a visit 8 to 8 ½ years in the future
- Continuing Accreditation visits scheduled for 2015-2016 will not be shifted, but programs that are recommended and approved by CAAHEP for continuing accreditation during that time period will be receiving a projected visit date 7 ½ to 8 ½ years from the last visit.
- Programs whose next site visit is supposed to occur in 2017 and 2018 will not be changed to a different year, even though some programs that were due to be visited in fall 2018 will be moved to spring 2018. Programs that are recommended and approved by CAAHEP for continuing accreditation during that time period will probably receive a projected visit date 9 ½ years from the last visit.
- Programs that are currently scheduled for a visit between 2019 and 2023 are being notified by MAERB that their visit will occur anywhere from 6 months to 2 years prior to the initially scheduled visit.
- Programs that are applying for initial accreditation will have a 5 year initial accreditation period and, if it is determined that the program is to be recommended for continuing accreditation, the next scheduled visit will take place anywhere from 6 to 9 ½ years after the initial accreditation visit, a practice that is consistent with current policy.
- Programs that are currently on probationary status due to a site visit have not received a date, so they will be appropriately slotted into the schedule based upon the date of the removal of probationary status.

It is anticipated that by fall 2026 MAERB will be resuming its schedule of a visit every 9 ½ years for the CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting program. At the same time, MAERB can request a comprehensive visit at any point.

This shift is purely an administrative one and affects approximately 75% of all CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs. The goal is to ensure the MAERB office and the MAERB volunteers can provide the same quality of service to all of the programs by equalizing the visits across the years. We recognize that there are budgetary implications, so our goal is to inform you as far in advance as possible. Please feel free to contact your case manager at the MAERB office if you have any further questions.

Upcoming Events: Accreditation Workshops and MAERB Forum

Accreditation Workshops, 2015 Standards and 2008 Standards

There will be two CAAHEP/MAERB Accreditation Workshops, dates outlined below, held at the AAMA Annual Conference (September 18-21, 2015) in Portland, OR. Many thanks to the AAMA, a CAAHEP sponsoring organization for the MAERB, in allowing us the time and space to hold those workshops in conjunction with the Annual Conference, so that Program Directors can get information about their CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs as well as participate in the professional development/continuing education activities that AAMA sponsors. The specific dates and times, as well as the process for registering, are listed below.

2015 Standards, September 19, 2015, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Beginning in January 2017, site visits will be conducted under the *2015 Standards and Guidelines*. Program Directors who have 2017 site visits scheduled will be given preference to attend this event, and, by April 1, 2015, they will be sent a special invitation that will allow them to register early in order to ensure their place. PDs with 2017 visits will have first priority until May 1, 2015. After May 1, 2015, the registration will be open for PDs with 2018 and 2019 visits and, if the workshop is not filled by June 1, 2015, we will then open it up to other registrants.

There will be an Accreditation Workshop for the 2015 Standards scheduled for late January/early February 2016. The precise date and location are still TBD.

2008 Standards, September 21, 2015, 8:00 am – 6:00 pm

This will be the last workshop scheduled for the *2008 Standards and Guidelines*. Program Directors with site visits scheduled for 2015 and 2016 will be given first preference to attend this event. After May 1, 2015, the event will be open for all registrants.

Please note that this workshop lasts until 6:00 pm and there is a two-hour lunch break so that participants can attend the AAMA President's Lunch. Participants who are not signed up for the AAMA conference are eligible to attend the President's Lunch by virtue of their registration at the Accreditation Workshop.

MAERB Forum, AAMA Annual Conference, Friday, September 18, 2015

As the sponsoring organization for the Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB), the AAMA hosts a session for MAERB Members to discuss new and continuing accreditation projects, initiatives, and issues with the Program Directors of medical assisting programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). This session also is very useful for MAERB surveyors, educators within CAAHEP accredited medical assisting programs, and educators interested in applying for CAAHEP accreditation. In addition to sharing information, MAERB is able to receive feedback from Program Directors and others.

Annual Report Form Survey, spring 2014: Focus on credentialing Exams

In spring 2014, the MAERB office surveyed the Program Directors of CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs. The quantitative results of that survey were shared with the Program Directors in the 2014 MAERB fall report that can be found on the MAERB website on the Documents tab. We will

continue to share more information provided to MAERB in a variety of reports, as the experts in the field have a great deal to share.

The ARF Survey was an extraordinarily useful tool in helping the MAERB members understand how program directors were working with the outcomes and the steps that they were taking to meet the required thresholds.

The Program Directors commented on all of the outcomes, and the credentialing exam outcome received a great deal of attention. Based upon the feedback and the data, MAERB adapted the exam outcome. As of the 2014 ARF, which all of the CAAHEP-accredited medical assisting programs have completed, there is a threshold of 30% participation rate of a programs students/graduates taking one of the four credential exams that can be used to satisfy that outcome. Then there is a 60% passage rate threshold for the students/graduates from the program who completed the exam. In the past, the passage rate was based upon the number of graduates from the program. Policy 1.16 in the *MAERB Policy and Procedures Manual* covers the ARF Process policy completely.

The MAERB asked the Program Directors what methods they used to have students participate in the exam. Below are the quantitative results.

What methods have you used to encourage and/or require students to take one of the credentialing exams? Please check all that are applicable.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Required for graduation	21.5%	98
Exam fee is part of student fee	49.1%	224
Set up campus as exam site	21.9%	100
Exam review is part of a class/the program	83.1%	379
Preparatory/Practice Tests	83.6%	381
Required purchase of review books	60.7%	277
Program events and activities that stress the importance of certification	51.5%	235
Sponsorship of study groups	14.7%	67

In addition to quantitative information, the MAERB office received a wealth of qualitative information from the Program Directors who responded to the survey.

The program directors were asked to share some of their best practices in having students take the exam. Some of those best practices are compiled below.

Best Practices for Exam Participation and Passage Rate

- The program pays for the exam fees, as it is built into the student fees
- A weekly optional study group or a weekend-long review course for the exam.
- Exam review books are funded by student fees, included in a review course
- Holding the exam on site
- Schedule an elective review course in the curriculum

- Require payment for the exam and a testing date prior to graduation
- If the student sit for the exam and pass it prior to the end of the semester before graduation, they are exempt from the final exam in their capstone course/final course
- Schedule regular professional development sessions throughout the program in which professional memberships and credentialing is covered
- Investing in a software program that reviews exam material
- Involve the local MA chapter to mentor and support the students in their goals for credentialing
- Hold program fundraiser for scholarship exam funds
- Offer one-on-one tutoring
- Build in the “assumption” (not requirement) that all the students will take a certification exam and embed it into every class of the program
- Reimburse the exam fee for students who pass
- Give the students a review book when they demonstrate that they have sent in the application for one of the certification exams

Naturally enough, these practices can’t apply to all programs. For example, some systems do not allow programs to use student fees to pay for exams. Or, as another example, programs don’t find it financially feasible to apply to serve as a testing center. Despite those limitations, the suggestions are a useful compendium of good pragmatic and practical advice. In addition, many programs commented that with the CMS Meaningful Use requirement, local employers and/or states were beginning to require that students have a credential. As many program directors noted, however, that is not a requirement across the board. There are a number of complexities, ranging from local environment to student test taking anxiety, involved in achieving the thresholds of the outcomes. The MAERB will be continuing this discussion of best practices for the exam participation and passage outcomes as well as the other outcomes in future MAERB reports.

MAERB Support for the Annual Report

In the ARF survey, the Program Directors commented on the support that they received from the MAERB office. The MAERB staff again thanks the Program Directors for the compliments they received, and we take very seriously the constructive criticism that the Program Directors offer. Outlined below are some strategies that we have taken in order to respond to the helpful suggestions, and we will continue to work on making the process more consistent and clear for the Program Directors.

On-Demand Instructions

MAERB now has five short (10-15 minutes) webinars providing directions for completing the ARF that are accessible to be viewed at the MAERB website on the Documents tab, so that Program Directors can access a visual at any point.

Advance Notice about Go-Live Dates, completion times, and information.

MAERB now sends out an email 30 days prior to the Annual Report Form opening in the fall and the spring in order to inform Program Directors that the information about the ARF will be coming. PDs still have six weeks to complete the inputting of the data, but the extra 30 days allows for more time for preparation. The MAERB office has made a commitment to keep to the timelines that we share with the PDs so that they can budget their time accordingly.

Outlined below are the timelines for the 2015 ARF so that PDs can plan for the year:

Fall Submissions, 2015 ARF (2014 admission cohorts and updates)

August 14, 2015: Program Directors receive a notice informing them that in 30 days they will be able to access the ARF.

September 16, 2015: Program Directors can access their ARF in order to submit their data.

October 21, 2015: Deadline for ARF submission (no grace period)

Spring Submissions, 2015 ARF (2014 admission cohorts and updates)

December 18, 2015: Program Directors receive a notice informing them that in 30 days they will be able to access the ARF.

January 15, 2016: Program Directors can access their ARF in order to submit their data.

February 19, 2016: Deadline for ARF submission (no grace period)

Consistency within the MAERB Office

There were a number of comments that the information supplied to Program Directors from the MAERB office needed to be more consistent. The MAERB Office has just instituted office ARF Boot Camp days in which all of the ARFs are reviewed as a group to ensure that there is consistency with the review. In addition, there have been a number of in-staff training sessions so that all of the case managers are trained in the same areas. Our goal is to support the Program Directors as they do the important work of reporting their outcomes.

Timely Response to the ARFs

The MAERB office is making a concerted effort to respond to the ARFs with an acknowledgment letter in order to keep the programs informed. The process is somewhat complicated as the MAERB staff need to follow up with individual PDs when the information on the ARF looks somewhat inconsistent. We will continue to work on that goal, as we recognize the PDs and the advisory committees appreciate that information. It is important to remember that, unless your program is audited, the MAERB staff cannot verify that the numbers submitted are correct, so the acknowledgment letter that we send focuses only on what appears on the form.