



# Accreditation Review Process Guidelines

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY, CLINICAL SOCIOLOGY,  
PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGICAL  
PRACTICE PROGRAMS

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# **Accreditation Review Process Guidelines**

## **Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs**

### **I. Introduction to the Accreditation Review Process**

These *Review Process Guidelines* have been prepared by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology (hereafter referred to as the Commission) to facilitate the accreditation review process. These guidelines are intended for use by the Accreditation Review Committee and the applicant program (hereafter referred to as the Program). The guidelines identify the objectives of the review process and detail the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved. The site visit is only one component in the overall accreditation review process as specified in the *Accreditation of Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs: Policies and Procedures* (hereafter referred to as the *Policies and Procedures*).

#### **A. Objectives of the Accreditation Review Process**

1. To determine whether or not an applicant Program meets the Standards established by the Commission.
2. To recommend to the Commission whether an applicant Program should be accredited.

#### **B. Steps of the Accreditation Review Process (See Appendix A for Suggested Timeline)**

1. The Accreditation Review Process is initiated when a Program submits a completed application for accreditation, including \$100 application fee, to the Commission Chair.
2. If the application shows that preconditions for accreditation are met, the Chair requests submission of a Program *Accreditation Self Study Report* (hereafter referred to as the Report) and a \$2000 Accreditation fee. In addition to the request for an *Accreditation Self Study Report*, the Chair sends copies of the *Accreditation Standards (BA or MA)*, *Guidelines for the Accreditation Self-Study Report*, *Accreditation of Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs: Policies and Procedures*, and *Accreditation Review Process Guidelines* to the applicant program.
3. The Program submits the Report to the Commission Chair. The Report may be in hard copy or electronic format. The Report (whether hard copy or electronic) must include the full text of all required elements.

4. Upon receipt of the Report and the accreditation fee of \$2000, the Commission Chair reviews the Report for completeness. If the Report is incomplete, the Chair informs the applicant program of the additional material needed for a complete Self Study Report, and the program resubmits the Report to the Chair.
5. When the Chair of the Commission determines that the Report is complete, s/he appoints an Accreditation Review Committee, designates the Site Visit Team and asks the applicant program to send 6 hard copy versions of the Report to the Chair.
6. The Chair of the Commission sends the Report to the Accreditation Review Committee.
7. The Accreditation Review Committee will:
  - a. Conduct an initial review of the self study materials provided by the applicant Program.
  - b. Hold a pre-site visit conference or conferences. A conference may be in person, through a conference call, through an Internet chat session, or through another means deemed appropriate by the Commission. (Hereinafter in these guidelines the term *conference* shall refer to any of these means of exchanging information.)
8. During a conference, the Accreditation Review Committee will:
  - a. Determine the extent to which the self study materials support the granting of accreditation by the Commission.
  - b. Determine what additional information, if any, is necessary to determine the extent to which the applicant Program meets the Standards set by the Commission.
9. Following the conference or conferences, the Site Visit Team will:
  - a. Complete pre-site visit preparation.
  - b. Conduct the site visit.
  - c. Prepare the site visit report.
10. Following the site visit, the Accreditation Review Committee will:
  - a. Hold a post-site visit conference.
  - b. Prepare and submit a draft Accreditation Review Committee report to the Program for review and comment.

- c. Hold a conference to review the comments of the applicant Program and incorporate changes, if applicable.
- d. Prepare and submit the Accreditation Review Committee's report to the Commission. This report will include the Committee's recommendation on whether the applicant Program should be accredited, and the basis for that recommendation.

11. Following the receipt of the Accreditation Review Committee's report, the Commission will:

- a. Make its decision on whether the Program meets its standards and may be accredited
- b. Communicate its decision, and a copy of its report, to the applicant Program.

### **C. Professionalism and Adherence to Ethical Standards**

Any member of the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology having a potential or actual **conflict of interest** is expected to exclude her or himself from all actions in an accreditation review process as stated in the *Policies and Procedures*. Further, results of the accreditation review process shall be **confidential** and may be released only by official action of the Commission. No individual member of the Commission, the Accreditation Review Committee, staff or others involved in the process shall make any disclosure about individual program evaluations. Members of the Accreditation Review Committee shall adhere to the highest standards of **professionalism** and conduct their review in a timely manner.

## **II. Accreditation Review Committee**

### **A. Initiation of the Accreditation Review Process**

The Review Process begins with the submission of a complete application with fee and Self Study Report with fee by an applicant Program. The Accreditation Review Committee is appointed by the Commission Chair. The Accreditation Review Committee has five members; the chair, two site visitors, and two reviewers. The chair is a present or former member of the Commission. The site visitors have undergone Commission sponsored training for the role. The reviewers are sociologists who are knowledgeable about training programs in clinical, applied, public sociology or sociological practice.

### **B. Membership of the Accreditation Review Committee**

1. The Accreditation Review Committee shall be appointed by the Commission Chair.

2. The Chair of the Committee and members of the Site Visit Team shall have completed a training workshop recognized by the Commission. Recognized training programs shall focus on issues encountered in the analysis of self-study reports, policies and procedures that govern the accreditation review process, and the format for making reports to the Commission. The training is intended to insure consistency in the interpretation and application of the accreditation standards during the review process.
3. The Commission shall sponsor this training periodically and shall maintain a roster of individuals who have completed the training and are therefore eligible to serve as the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee or as a member of the Site Visit Team.

### **C. Roles and Responsibilities of Committee Members**

The Accreditation Review Committee has five members: the chair, two site visitors, and two reviewers. Their roles and responsibilities are described below.

**Chair:** The chair is a present or former member of the Commission. The chair heads the Accreditation Review Committee with full vote but does not participate in the site visit.

1. Prior to the site visit, the Chair of the Review Committee shall:
  - a. call and preside at all conferences of the committee, and keep informal notes of the discussion;
  - b. ensure that all committee members have received all materials regarding the applicant Program;
  - c. work with the site visitors and the applicant Program in the scheduling of the site visit;
  - d. schedule a conference or conferences of the committee in sufficient time prior to the site visit to provide guidance to the site visitors;
  - e. review the materials on the applicant Program based on the Standards of the Commission prior to the first conference and the site visit;
  - f. evaluate the materials presented by the applicant Program based on the Standards of the Commission;
  - g. provide input and guidance to the site visitors as to the issues to be considered in the site visit;
  - h. be available during the site visit for contact by telephone if necessary.

2. Subsequent to the site visit, the Committee Chair shall:
  - a. evaluate the report of the site visitors;
  - b. schedule a conference of the committee within 30 days of the site visit to discuss the site visitors' report and the committee's findings;
  - c. prepare an interim report of the findings based on the committee's discussion;
  - d. transmit an interim report of the committee's findings to the Program, within 60 days of the site visit, and invite clarification of issues;
  - e. transmit any clarifying statements from the applicant Program to the committee;
  - f. schedule a conference subsequent to receipt of the Program's response;
  - g. participate in the committee review and evaluation of the applicant Program during the conference
  - h. participate in the final decision and recommendation to the Commission regarding the applicant Program;
  - i. prepare the report to the Commission on the committee's findings and recommendation;
  - j. transmit the report, together with any minority report(s), to the Commission within 90 days of the site visit;
  - k. present and discuss the report(s) in person at a Commission meeting (annual or regular per by-laws).

**Site Visitors:** The site visitors are members of the Accreditation Review Committee who have been trained by the Commission to conduct the site visit. There are two members of the site visit team, with one serving as the site visit team leader.

1. It shall be the responsibility of the site visitors to:
  - a. evaluate the materials presented by the applicant Program based on the Standards of the Commission;
  - b. work with the applicant Program and the committee chair on the scheduling of the site visit;
  - c. prepare questions and issues which must be considered in the site visit prior to the first conference;

- d. participate in pre-site visit conferences(s).
- e. review these issues subsequent to the conference, to include the comments of other committee members;
- f. conduct the site visit following the requirements set by the Accreditation Review Committee;
- g. follow the guidelines described in *this document*;
- h. report back in writing to the committee on the site visit prior to a post-visit conference;
- i. review clarifying materials submitted by the Program prior to the next conference;
- j. provide a summary of the site visit report at the second conference;
- k. participate in the committee review and evaluation of the applicant Program during the post-visit conferences;
- l. participate in the final decision and recommendation to the Commission regarding the applicant Program.

**Reviewers:** Outside reviewers are sociologists chosen because of their experience or familiarity with training programs in applied, clinical, public sociology or sociological practice. Reviewers are expected to review in detail the Standards of the Commission. They participate in the Accreditation Review Committee with full vote, but do not conduct the site visit.

*Reviewers may not suggest changes in the Standards as part of the work of an Accreditation Review Committee. Comments about the Standards are welcome and should be provided in writing to the Commission.*

1. It shall be the responsibility of the reviewers to:
  - a. review the materials provided by the applicant Program based on the Standards of the Commission prior to the first conference and the site visit;
  - b. evaluate the materials presented by the applicant Program based on the Standards of the Commission;
  - c. participate in pre-site visit conferences;
  - d. provide input and guidance to the site visitors as to the issues to be considered in the site visit;
  - e. subsequent to the site visit, evaluate the report of the site visitors;

- f. participate in post-site visit conferences;
- g. review clarifying materials submitted by the Program subsequent to the site visit;
- h. participate in the committee review and evaluation of the applicant Program during post-visit conferences;
- i. participate in the final decision and recommendation to the Commission regarding the applicant Program.

#### **D. Committee Decision-Making Process**

At the conclusion of the committee's deliberation, the committee shall take a vote on its report. The committee should make every effort to reach a unanimous conclusion. In the event that a unanimous decision is not achieved, the majority's recommendation shall be reported to the Commission. Any dissenting member(s) may submit a minority report to the Commission. It shall be the responsibility of the chair to transmit both the majority and minority reports to the Commission. All members of the committee should transmit their reports to the Commission through the chair of the Committee. If they believe it necessary, dissenting member(s) may request the opportunity to present their views to the Commission in person. However, no member of the Accreditation Review Committee shall contact members of the Commission privately, outside of the official review committee process, to attempt to influence their votes.

### **III. Accreditation Review Process: Pre-Site Visit**

#### **A. Appointment of Accreditation Review Committee**

Once the application, fee, and self-study report have been submitted by an applicant Program, the Commission Chair shall appoint the Accreditation Review Committee, as described in II A, above.

#### **B. Review of Documents**

1. The Commission Chair shall conduct an initial review of the application to determine its completeness.
2. The members of the Accreditation Review Committee shall independently conduct a review of the materials provided by the applicant Program, determining the extent to which these materials are responsive to the information requested in the application.
3. The members of the Accreditation Review Committee shall share their analysis of the application materials in their first conference or conferences, and shall suggest to the Site Visit Team areas of special concern or areas where additional information should be obtained during the site visit.

## **IV. Accreditation Review Process: The Site Visit**

The site visit is an important component of the accreditation review process. The site visit is scheduled following review of the Program's Self Study Report and serves the purpose of enabling the Site Visit Team to gain additional information concerning the ways in which the Program attempts to meet the accreditation standards as specified in the *Standards for Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs* (hereafter referred to as the *Standards*).

The site visit is a cooperative event and it is important that both the Program and the Site Visit Team approach it with this understanding. The site visit provides the opportunity for the Program to create the best, most informative possible impression on the Site Visit Team and the Site Visit Team will want to gain as thorough as possible of an appreciation and understanding of the Program.

### **A. Objectives of the Site Visit**

The main objectives of the site visit are:

1. To determine the extent to which the applicant Program has a clear mission.
2. To determine the extent to which the applicant Program has clear goals that it regularly assesses.
3. To verify and clarify the description of the Program as presented in the Self Study Report.
4. To assess the Program against its own stated goals.
5. To assess the Program against the Standards of the Commission.
6. To evaluate the level of administrative and financial support for the Program.
7. To obtain all information necessary for the evaluation of the Program.
8. To prepare a report for the Accreditation Review Committee on the extent to which the applicant Program meets the standards of the Commission.

### **B. Site Visit Team Members**

1. The Commission Chair shall choose the two members of the Site Visit Team, and shall designate which member shall be the team leader.
2. Sufficient information will be gathered during the site visit to provide a sound basis for the Site Visit Team's evaluation. Site Visit Team members should not provide consultation concerning programs at other institutions.

3. The Site Visit Team is an inquiring arm of the Accreditation Review Committee.
  - a. It is composed of professional colleagues.
  - b. It has the responsibility for fact-finding and clarification.
  - c. It is responsible for writing a site visit report on the applicant Program.
  - d. It is responsible for presenting and interpreting the facts about the applicant Program to the Accreditation Review Committee.
4. The Site Visit Team functions as a unit with one member designated as the team leader. In general, the Site Visit Team leader provides as complete an understanding as possible of what the site visit will entail so that the Program director and faculty can be as prepared as possible. The site visit should be a constructive collegial interaction between the Program and the Site Visit Team. The team leader:
  - a. Establishes the dates for the site visit in consultation with the Program director and the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee.
  - b. Serves as the official spokesperson for the team.
  - c. Communicates the site visit agenda to the Program director who will establish a specific schedule for the Site Visit Team.
  - d. Provides guidance to the Program director concerning any additional data or information that should be made available at the time of the visit, and insures that the needed information is gathered during the visit.
  - e. Conducts an exit conference to provide the Program director the opportunity to make a summary statement and to review the subsequent steps in the accreditation review process.
  - f. Coordinates the writing of the site visit team report for submission to the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee.

### **C. Pre-Site Visit Preparation by the Site Visit Team**

The site visit is an important component of the accreditation review process and requires preparation in advance to complete an efficient and effective visit. Pre-visit preparation by members of the site visit team shall include:

1. A thorough knowledge of the accreditation policies and procedures.
2. A thorough knowledge of the Standards for Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs and their interpretations, and the problems frequently encountered in their application.

3. A complete familiarity with the Program's Self Study Report.
4. A complete familiarity with the Accreditation Review Committee's pre-site visit conference discussion.
5. A thorough understanding of areas noted as problematic in the pre-site visit conference.
6. A careful reading of the following documents:
  - a. *Accreditation of Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs: Policies and Procedures*
  - b. *Standards for Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs* (at the level at which the program is applying)
  - c. Applicant Program's *Accreditation Self Study Report*
  - d. Applicant Program's university bulletins or catalogs
  - e. Applicant Program's brochures, pamphlets, and/or handbooks
  - f. *Accreditation Review Process Guidelines*
7. Setting an agenda for the site visit that will provide an opportunity to examine areas noted as problematic in the pre-site visit conference call.

#### **D. Responsibilities of the Applicant Program**

The Applicant Program has a number of responsibilities in preparation for the site visit. Careful attention to these will help to ensure an efficient and effective visit. These responsibilities include:

1. Setting a specific schedule for the site visit, including:
  - a. The names and credentials of persons to be interviewed;
  - b. A list of the places to be visited (i.e. practicum sites);
  - c. A list of other activities in keeping with the agenda provided by the Site Visit Team leader.
2. Submitting the schedule two weeks in advance of the visit.

3. Assembling materials used in preparation of the Self Study Report, gathered at a central location to be readily available for review during the site visit. Such materials shall include:
  - a. Examples of students' work;
  - b. Critical assessment of students' work;
  - c. Examples of work related to the practice experience;
  - d. Student manuals;
  - e. Labor contracts;
  - f. Other documents as determined by the Accreditation Review Committee.
4. Providing a room that can be locked in which the Site Visit Team can carry out its activities in privacy. This room should contain a telephone; a conference table; a computer and printer; and other furniture for the exclusive use and comfort of the Site Visit Team.
5. Insuring that the accreditation review process be in compliance with specific disclosure regulations governing that institution.

#### **E. Site Visit Schedule**

1. A site visit schedule is prepared based on the agenda and other specific needs for information. The site visit will normally require at least two full-working days spread over three calendar days. The length of the visit will depend on a number of factors including faculty size, practicum site proximity, problematic issues and complexity of programs.
2. Team members should arrive in the afternoon of Day 1 in time to meet privately to finalize details of the site visit and reconfirm roles and tasks of Site Visit Team members. Following this conference, the site visitors will meet with the Program director to review and if necessary request modification in the schedule and to begin the review of the program.
3. Day 2 is devoted to site visit activities. In many cases, the site visit will be completed by mid-afternoon of Day 3.
4. On Day 3 the Site Visit Team will meet and any additional clarifying information or explanations should be requested. Upon completion, the Site Visit Team conducts an exit conference with the Program director and other appropriate institutional representatives to provide the Program director the opportunity to make a summary statement and to review the subsequent steps in the accreditation review process.
5. The Site Visit Team will have time scheduled prior to departure to draft the Site Visit Team Report.

## **F. Model for the Site Visit Schedule.**

Prior to arrival on campus, the agenda and schedule should have been established through negotiation between the Site Visit Team leader and the Program director. *During the visit, time needs to be left for team conferences and any evening interactions should be finished early so that Site Visit Team members can complete their responsibilities*

A suggested agenda is as follows:

### Day 1:

1. Team members arrive in the afternoon and complete the following:
  - a. Confer and review site visit schedule.
  - b. Meet with Program director to confirm site visit schedule and request any additional data or material needed during the site visit.
  - c. Get acquainted with Program administrators and faculty in an informal group gathering.

### Day 2:

1. Morning
  - a. Meet with the department chairperson, Program director, and Program faculty as a group. The discussion focuses on an overview and history of the Program, the role of the site visit within the accreditation process, and pertinent details regarding this site visit. This conference will be scheduled for approximately 1 hour with a 15 minute presentation by the Program and remaining time for discussion. Both Site Visit Team members will be involved in this conference.
  - b. Meet with Program director, department chair, each Program faculty member, appropriate higher level administration (the dean of faculty and/or college, sometimes the provost or president), other faculty who have close relationships with the Program but are not in the Program, and adjunct faculty. Depending on the size of the Program, the Site Visit Team members may meet individually or together with these persons. If separate conferences are held, the Site Visit Leader shall meet with the highest ranking administrator.
2. Afternoon
  - a. Tour campus and meet with other functionary and support units such as library, computer center, placement services, other student support services.
  - b. Meet separately with students and with Program alumni. Faculty of the Program shall not be present at these conferences. Both Site Visit Team members will be present at these conferences.

- c. Meet with Program staff.
- d. Review relevant records.
- e. Meet with Program's community advisory committee.

### Day 3

1. The Site Visit Team members remain on site until the completion of the following:
  - a. Meet with the practicum coordinator and visit a minimum of 2 sites.
  - b. If appropriate, contact other community organizations with which the Program has public and professional outreach relationships.
  - c. Conduct an exit conference with Program director and other appropriate institutional representatives.
  - d. Develop a draft of the Site Visit Report before departing.

*This is only a model. Individual circumstances may require modifications and/or a longer visit.*

### **G. Site Visit Expenses**

1. The Program shall be responsible for expenses of the Site Visit Team. The following are suggested expense guidelines for the Program:
  - a. Travel Regulations: Authorization to travel as a member of the Site Visit Team shall be a letter from the appropriate institution administrator that approves such expenditures.
  - b. The responsibility for purchasing travel tickets rests with the institution. It is assumed all Site Visit Team members traveling by air will use coach air travel accommodations. If a Team member travels by rail, the Team member shall receive a reserved seat for day-time travel.
  - c. Reimbursement will be allowed for taxicabs and for airport limousine fares (plus tip of 15%) to, from, and between plane/rail terminals.
  - d. Site Visit Team members are expected to submit receipts to the Program director.
  - e. If a Site Visit Team member drives a privately owned automobile, reimbursement will be allowed at the currently approved institutional rate based on either standard highway map distances or odometer reading. If Site Visit Team members travel by car and incur expenses related to highway, bridge, and tunnel

- tolls, ferry fares and parking fees, they are to submit receipts to the Program director.
2. Lodging and Meals:
    - a. The Program director is responsible for arranging separate hotel accommodations for each Site Visit Team member.
    - b. Receipts will be required for reimbursement of meal expenses. Any out-of-pocket expenses for meals will be reimbursed by the institution on the basis of a completed expense report and receipts.
  3. Reimbursement: The Program is responsible for reimbursing Site Visit Team members within two weeks of the site visit.

#### **H. Site Visit Team Report**

The Site Visit Team shall prepare a written report of its findings which is submitted to the Accreditation Review Committee

### **V. Accreditation Review Process: Post Site Visit**

#### **A. Post Site Visit Conference**

1. The site visit team shall provide a written report to the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee for distribution to the full Committee.
2. Following the receipt of the site visit report, the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee shall organize a conference with the full Committee to review and, if necessary, modify the site visit report.

#### **B. Report to the Site for Review and Comment**

Following the initial approval of the site visit report by the Accreditation Review Committee, a copy of the report shall be sent to the Program director of the applicant Program for comment on its accuracy. The applicant Program director may indicate areas where the report is factually incorrect, and may suggest alternative explanations of the site visitors' findings.

#### **C. Post-Site Visit Conference on Applicant Program's Comments**

1. The applicant Program's comments on the draft site visit report shall be *received* [provided] by the Accreditation Review Committee chair and *provided* to all members of the Committee.

Following the receipt of the applicant Program's response to the draft site visit report, the chair of the Accreditation Review Committee shall arrange a conference to discuss its findings and agree on the contents of its report.

#### **D. Report to the Commission**

The Accreditation Review Committee shall review all materials concerning accreditation. Following the Committee's conference discussions, the chair of the Committee shall prepare a report of its findings and recommendation on accreditation to the Commission.

1. This report shall contain the Committee's findings of fact.
2. This report shall contain the Committee's recommendation to the Commission regarding the accreditation of the applicant program.

#### **VI. Accreditation Review Process: Commission Decision**

The Commission receives all materials from the Accreditation Review Committee and makes the final determination on accreditation.

The chair of the Accreditation Review Committee shall present the Committee's findings and recommendations, including both majority and minority reports, to the Commission.

Under normal circumstances, the Commission shall communicate its decision on accreditation and its final report to the Program within 90 days of receiving the report of the Accreditation Review Committee.

## **Appendix A**

### **Accreditation and Re-Accreditation Process: Suggested Timeline**

1. Process Begins:

Program submits application for accreditation with *application fee* of \$100 to Commission Chair. If preconditions are met per application information, program begins work on self study report. The Program will refer to the following documents throughout this process: *Accreditation Standards (BA or MA)*, *Guidelines for the Accreditation Self-Study Report (BA or MA)*, *Accreditation of Applied Sociology, Clinical Sociology, Public Sociology and Sociological Practice Programs: Policies and Procedures*, and *Accreditation Review Process Guidelines*.  
Estimated time: 2-3 weeks

2. Program prepares Self Study Report.

Estimated time: 2-3 months

3. Program submits Self Study Report (1 copy) *with accreditation fee* of \$2000 to Commission Chair. Chair reviews Self Study Report for completeness. If Self study Report is deemed complete Chair forms an Accreditation Review Committee and requests an additional 5 copies of the Self Study Report for distribution to this committee.

Estimated time: 3-4 weeks

4. Accreditation Review Committee reviews Self Study Report and schedules conference call and additional conference calls as necessary.

Estimated time: 2-3 months

5. If Self Study Report is deemed acceptable by Accreditation Review Committee a site visit is scheduled.

Estimated time: 2-3 weeks

6. Site visit (September, October, November, February, March and April; see Section 7.1)

Estimated time: 3 days (Refer to *Review Process Guidelines* for details)

7. Site visitors write report and submit to full Accreditation Review Committee.

Estimated time: 2-3 weeks

8. Accreditation Review Committee writes final report with recommendations.

Estimated time: 2-3 weeks

9. Accreditation Review Committee Chair submits final report with recommendations to Commission Board (summer meeting/August or winter meeting/February); Board accepts or rejects recommendation.

Estimated time: 1 day

10. Process ends:

Programs recommended and accepted for full accreditation (5 years).

Programs recommended and accepted for provisional accreditation (2 years).

Programs recommended and accepted for full re-accreditation (7 years).

Programs recommended and accepted for probationary re-accreditation (2 years).