



Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS
FOR GRADUATE-LEVEL EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAMS IN PROFESSIONAL COACHING**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Excerpt from October 2018 Version of the Academic Standards

PREFACE

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The unabridged document (over 129 pages) includes sub standards and references for each Academic Standard and is available to GSAEC Institutional members.

These Academic Standards were rigorously developed and intended primarily for graduate academic programs (certificate and/or degree-granting) that emphasize professional coaching as an emerging academic discipline. Graduate academic institutions that are developing and/or offering individual courses in this field may also find the guidelines useful.

The Academic Standards also serve as the core evaluation measures for academic coaching program evaluation and recognition (self-study and peer review) and promote external objective assessment and critique in order to yield a quality academic coaching program.

GSAEC offers its members consultation support services to help institutions design, implement, assess, and enhance their academic coaching programs. For more information, contact support@GSAEC.org.

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are intended primarily for graduate academic programs (certificate and/or degree-granting) that emphasize professional coaching as an emerging academic discipline. Graduate academic institutions that are developing and/or offering individual courses in this field may also find the guidelines useful.

The guidelines consist of a series of 20 Academic Standards according to the following architecture.

1. Label
2. Narrative introduction outlining the source materials that inform the construction of each standard and related sub-standards
3. One- to three-sentence description
4. A listing of sub-standards with short descriptions, indicators and/or examples
5. A detailed list of references for each standard in the Appendix of the document

The standards are presented and organized into four major Sections (See Figure 1):

Section A Institutional Alignment

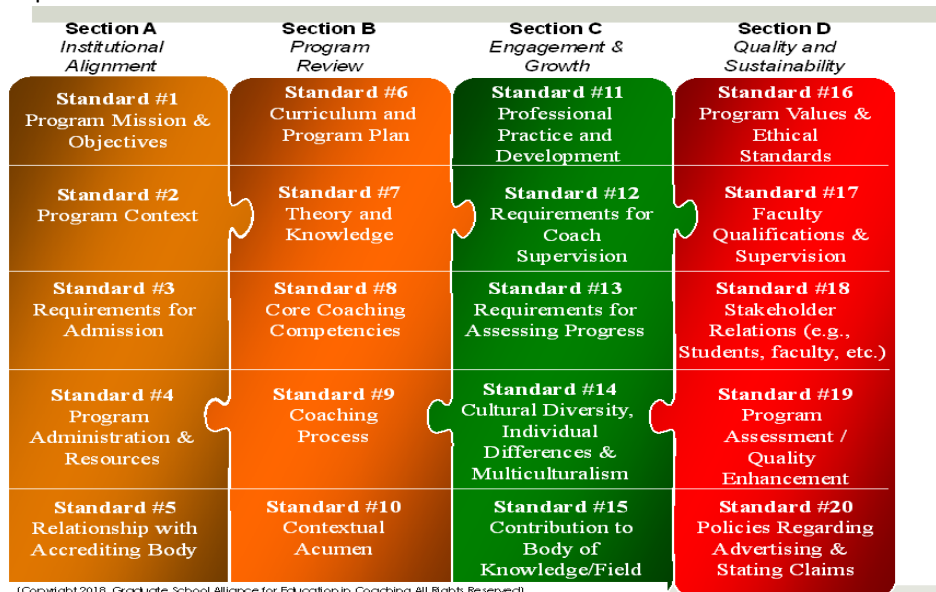
Section B Program Review

Section C Engagement & Growth

Section D Quality & Sustainability.

These guidelines are intended to communicate the “story” embedded in the journey of creating and sustaining highly effective graduate-level professional coaching programs.

Figure 1 | GSAEC Academic Standards



DEFINITIONS: COACHING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL COACHING

Coaching is an emerging and cross-disciplinary occupation (Gray, 2011). To be considered as a profession, it needs to embody a comprehensive set of knowledge skills, attitudes, and standards (Elman et al., 2005). Further, the status of coaching as a legitimate, consensually acknowledged profession requires a graduate level of professional coach education that meets rigorous academic criteria.

GSAEC has developed a comprehensive set of academic standards, grounded in current theory and research, to better inform professional coach preparation (Maltbia et al, 2014). Coach education, built upon these principles, is evolving quickly and holds tremendous potential for a greater influence in the international coaching community. The standards presented here are grounded in the definitions of coach education and professional coaching outlined in this section.

To start, education in coaching at the graduate level, grounded in academic standards, is defined by GSAEC as:

A deep exploration of current, relevant theories, research, and models spanning a broad, multidisciplinary and multicultural spectrum, which informs the practice of professional coaching.

Adhering to adult learning theory (Knowles, 1975), graduate level students/participants are inspired to expand their boundaries of knowledge through research by learning to deal with unpredictable and complex situations, both systematically and creatively. Grounded in a relational learning model focused on student/participant-driven inquiry (Norwood & Burke, 2013), differentiated learning modalities are applied to help build the capacities within the learner. A comprehensive education program blends both theory and research with the training and development of the coach that serves as a foundation for professional success (Murphy, 2006).

With effective modeling, teaching, and close supervision by faculty who are themselves professional coaches (and/or researchers, adult educators), students practice the skills, competencies, attitudes, and behaviors necessary in becoming effective coaches with individual clients and teams (Clutterbuck & Megginson, (2011). Therefore, it is imperative that students/participants learn and demonstrate how to “observe, assess, and understand nuanced aspects of a coaching interaction, that result in making appropriate professional judgments in the moment” (Campone, 2014, p. 27), leading to coaching interventions that strategically target clients’ goals. The Academic Standards included in Section B (Program Review) and Section C (Engagement and Growth) provide clear provisions for high-quality coaching education in action; while those outlined in Section D (Quality and Sustainability) list guidelines for ensuring program success over time.

Further, GSAEC’s academic standards are rooted conceptually in an examination of the definition of professional coaching presented by the largest association in the world, the International Coach Federation (ICF), which defines the concept as:

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment.

The constituent elements of this definition are examined below.

- *“partnering” as “...a thought-provoking and creative process”*— the idea that thinking together provokes further thought and yields creativity is implied by philosophical traditions of dialogue dating back at least to Classical Greece. More recently, the influence of Lev Vygotsky (1979) has stimulated collaborative and cooperative learning in schools around the world (Fernandez, Wegerif, Mercer, & Rojas-Drummond, 2001; Forman & Cazden, 1998). The back-and-forth process referred to as “partnering” in coaching can also be related to expertise development (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993), to preventing errors in a context of complexity (Weick & Stuecliff, 2001), and to improving quality of learning (Williams & Sheridan, 2006).
- *“clients”*— there is variation in the term used to refer to the recipients of professional coaching. The ICF definition uses “clients,” a term that is also used by commercial/expert change agents such as lawyers or retail salespeople. To differentiate coaching participants from this implication of “client,” many coaches refer to the people they work with as “coachees.” The term “client” is also often used by counselors and psychotherapists (with the exception of medical professionals such as psychiatrists who are more likely to use the term “patient”). Research by Hart, Blattner, and Leipsic (2001) reported differences between coaching and therapy as identified by a survey of professionals who did both. Despite the overlap in the work of these two types of “constructive / facilitative change agents,” survey professionals noted “...a profound difference in relating while conducting coaching versus therapy... *all* of the participants agreed that coaching is more goal directed, action based, and outwardly defined” (p. 230). Although it is a neologism, the term “coachee” differentiates the activity from therapy on the one hand and sales or fiduciary services on the other.
- *“inspires”*— the exclusion of commercial sales and coercion from the definition of coaching begs a motivational principle other than immediate material benefit or punishment. In his survey of recent social psychological and positive psychology research, Dan Pink (2011) concludes that, given conditions of relative safety and security, motivations to develop one’s capacity and to serve a higher purpose prevail. ICF competencies (www.coachfederation.org/credentials) include “Designing Actions” and “Planning and Goal Setting” that support the development of a coachee’s capacities in areas of interest to the coachee. Although ICF competencies do not specifically mention it, many coach training programs focus on identifying a coachee’s “purpose in life” (see, for example, Success Unlimited Network www.successunlimitednet.com and Coaches Training Institute www.coactive.com).

- “maximize personal and professional potential”—recent discoveries in the neurosciences around the turn of the 20th Century emphasized the role of experience-dependent neuroplasticity, promoting renewed impetus to explore human potential for change, especially in professional coaching (Rock & Page, 2009). Current coaching researchers Pereira Dias and colleagues (2015) call for studies to bridge neuroscience and coaching and point out “...technical challenges involved in this endeavor and the possible experimental designs that might contribute to our understanding of how coaching modifies the brain to promote personal change and well-being” (p. 12).
- “in today’s uncertain and complex environment”—in 1947, Warren Weaver called for a new approach to scientific understanding. He explained that science had succeeded in identifying and classifying much of what he called “simple” phenomena by the beginning of the 20th Century and had begun to apply statistical methods to what he called “disorganized complexity” by the time of his writing (Weaver, 1947). However, he insisted, “Science must, over the next 50 years, learn to deal with these problems of organized complexity” (p. 6) that characterize interrelated, continuously interacting biological and social systems. Although scientists from the various fields that have complex systems as their focus have yet to agree on a common definition of complexity, it is a topic of interest from neuroscience to management to sports coaching (see for example Cushion, 2007). In 2012, the *International Coaching Psychology Review* published a debate entitled, “Coaching Psychology Coming of Age: The challenges we face in the messy world of complexity?” Although there were many ideas about how coaches could respond to a context of complexity, no one argued that today’s context is *not* complex and unpredictable.

As an academic discipline coalesces around professional coaching, it remains to be seen which existing bodies of research and theory, and which new ones, will make the greatest contributions to this relatively new form of constructive/facilitative change promotion. The GSAEC Academic Standards are intended to provide a repository and stimulus for this ongoing conversation regarding effective education in professional coaching.

OBJECTIVES

The GSAEC Board of Directors makes these guidelines available in order to:

- **Establish** standards for graduate-level, academic educational programs in professional coaching;
- **Stimulate** a dialogue with graduate academicians and their institutions around the world;
- **Test** a set of standards within graduate academic institutions; and
- **Co-design and implement** an accreditation process for graduate programs in the broad field of professional coaching in coordination with a professional accrediting organization.

BACKGROUND

The Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) first developed a set of academic guidelines in 2007 under the leadership of Lewis R. Stern as the chair of the Academic Standards Committee. This first version of the guidelines was informed largely by the experience of the committee members, including extensive work conducted by the Executive Coaching Forum (2004), which provided a solid foundation for our current work and resulted in a set of 15 standards for graduate programs in executive and organizational coaching.

In 2009, the standards committee was reconstituted with Terrence E. Maltbia assuming the role of chair. This second pass at standard development focused on a renewed commitment to explicitly ground each standard in academic literature and relevant research. An additional core strategy involved consulting accreditation source materials for standards to ensure that the GSAEC standards for academic programs align with best practices already underway in established accreditation bodies, as compiled by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Similarly, this second phase was informed by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training's standards for non-credit, non-degree programs.

This work expanded the initial 2007 set of standards from 15 to the present 20. In 2010, Linda Page joined Terrence Maltbia as co-chair of the academic standards committee to further this strategic priority for GSAEC. Michael Zwell joined Terry as Co-Chair in 2017 to focus on ICF equivalency and to explore alignment with other professional coaching associations (e.g., Center for Credentialing and Education, Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, and International Association of Coaching). The work is conceived as ongoing, with a focus on documenting each standard with further reference support and sample citations. The current version of the standards reflects the organization's name change to the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching, with an emphasis on professional coaching as an emerging academic discipline.

ASSUMPTIONS

We start with the recognition that graduate school offerings in professional coaching are diverse. Within the Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching, current and planned programs range:

- from the provision of coaching fieldwork;
- to individual courses and continuing education programs;
- to coaching concentrations within more general certificate or degree programs; and
- to full certificate and/or degree programs focused solely on professional coaching.

Some programs are built upon a specific, theoretical or applied model, while others are more eclectic, covering a wide range of theories, methods, and approaches.

Some programs primarily use live, face-to-face classroom study and practicum supervision, others are partially or completely reliant on distant-learning formats through electronic media and networks. Finally, some programs are housed in business schools, schools of education, professional schools of psychology or psychology departments, or other school divisions, or are offered through multi-disciplinary collaborations.

The guidelines presented in this document have been established to reflect and respect the diversity of professional coaching programs and their potential value. The assumption is that these programs are well constructed and managed. These guidelines are intended to assist institutions and faculty in developing educational and training programs in professional coaching that will provide the high-quality and rigor consistent with similar professional education and training programs within academia.

In general, the guidelines do not require specific content or numbers of hours of coursework or individual study or supervised application. They do, however, reflect the conviction that such elements be established and managed carefully for a program. In addition, where applicable, the guidelines include examples of best practices for comprehensive programs based on the experience of established academic programs in professional coaching. While not a certifying, nor accreditation body, GSAEC aim is for the academic standards outlined in this document be the gold standard for graduate level coaching education and training program worldwide. As such, as part of GSAEC's "peer program review process," specific provisions can be included for those programs wishing to seek accreditation with existing professional coach association such as CCE, IAC, ICF, and WABC (to name a few).

CONTEXT: THE STATE OF THE PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

From GSAEC's inception, and in keeping with the organization's name, these academic standards are intended to be applied to programs housed in degree-granting institutions accredited by the appropriate body or bodies in the jurisdiction in which they reside. These programs provide coach education and training at the graduate level. The standards in Section A address the relevance of accreditation at the organizational level that allows the host institution to grant degrees. This intention is applicable regardless of whether the various coaching programs offered lead to degrees. That is, whether-or-not any part of the coaching program may earn degree credit, the institution within which it is housed is assumed to be degree-granting. The requirement for regional accreditation introduces additional variability to the diversity of programs, especially for members of an international organization like GSAEC. Each region in each country has its own concerns, traditions, and requirements regarding acceptable standards for granting degrees.

In different jurisdictions, quality assurance and degree-granting status are overseen by government departments, independent organizations, or a combination. Common global standards may seem impossible to discuss, even at a high-level of generality, considering the variety of accreditation requirements for institutions that house executive and organizational coaching programs. However, for well over a decade, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has led the efforts of the accrediting bodies from many jurisdictions in coordinating and harmonizing a general set of standards.

INQAAHE is an international network of over 280 organizations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education. The network's main purposes are to collect, create, and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement, and maintenance of quality in higher education. Standards 1 through 5 in Section A and standards 16 through 20 in Section D are particularly informed by this work.

In an increasingly global, professional, and organizational context, common standards serve to facilitate:

- Comparative quality assessment;
- Lifelong learning by documenting the standards students have met and the outcomes they have achieved;
- Labor mobility via credit transfer and board recognition;
- Accountability by requiring institutions to articulate standards and outcomes; and
- Assurance that program graduates possess necessary knowledge and skills for employment and further study; and
- Ethical considerations in relation to the client, the organization, and the professional coaching standards in the greater context of increased sustainability of effectiveness of coaching.

The academic standards presented in the full version of the Academic Standards are intended to help professional coaching programs realize the benefits outlined above, as well as to ensure that

students/participant, and their faculty, are served by programs of high quality, along with enhancing the credibility and impact of effectiveness of coaching in the context defined herein.

GSAEC's research revealed a number of coaching associations' credentialing practices do not align with (likely unintentionally) the generally accepted professional standard that the "certification agency must not also be responsible for accreditation of educational or training programs or courses of study leading to the certification" (2003 Report, *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*, prepared by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA, now known as the Institute for Credentialing Excellence - ICE). The intent of ICE is to provide impartial, third-party validation that programs meet recognized national and international credentialing industry standards for development, implementation, and maintenance of certification programs (<http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/ncca>). GSAEC's aim is to leverage these academic standards to begin a conversation with key stakeholders from the various professional associations in the education and training arena to better understand the coach development "supply/value chain."

The board of directors of GSAEC hopes that the work of its Academic Standards Committee will provide a foundation for clarity and a level of quality assurance. The variety and proliferation of credentialing systems and the lack of attention to expected quality assurance standards has led to confusion and conflict among coach training providers, professional associations, and end-users, whether individual or corporate. This situation has, unfortunately, contributed to skepticism about value of coaching as a field of professional practice. GSAEC's academic standards, and peer review processes, are intended to contribute to the advancement of the field of professional coaching.
