

## **IABC/Chicago Accreditation Group Study Program 2007-2008 Program Year**

### **Frequently Asked Questions** by Joanne Kitsos, ABC

*In addition to reading this FAQ, review the accreditation information on [www.iabc.com](http://www.iabc.com) and on our chapter's Web site, including eligibility and application requirements.*

#### **What is IABC/Chicago's group study program?**

The IABC/Chicago group study program supports accreditation candidates as they proceed through the process of applying for accreditation, completing the ethics assessment, submitting the required portfolios, and passing a written and oral exam.

IABC/Chicago will administer the accreditation exam on Saturday, March 1, 2008, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at DePaul University in downtown Chicago. The exam also is offered at the IABC International Conference in June and by different chapters throughout the year.

#### **How does IABC/Chicago support the accreditation process?**

The group approach, directed by Chicago chapter ABCs, provides informational sessions on each step in the accreditation process. In addition, two accredited members in IABC/Chicago will review your portfolio summaries upon request before you send them to IABC. E-mail your portfolio write-ups (not the support material) to one or both of the chapter's accreditation directors. You will receive feedback on your samples within two weeks. Past candidates have found this to be one of the greatest benefits in the process. (*Tip: IABC will not return your portfolio, so keep a second set of samples for yourself.*)

We'll send you deadline reminders and conduct several one-hour conference calls in 2007-2008 in preparation for the exam. IABC/Chicago ABCs will serve as your mentors. During the conference calls, we'll discuss crisis communications, issues and trends, review the exam components, and offer exam-taking tips.

As a bonus, if there are five or more IABC/Chicago group study participants, each will receive a 10 percent member discount off the application fee (\$261 versus \$290 for IABC members, to be sent with the application. Non-members also can obtain a discount.) The discount does not apply if we have fewer than five candidates.

#### **How long is the accreditation group study program?**

For the 2007-2008 program year, it will take about six months – from the first conference call in mid-September to the exam on March 1.

An informational meeting/conference call is held every June in downtown Chicago. If you'd like to participate in person or via phone, e-mail the chapter's accreditation directors. They will notify you of the call-in number if you are unable to attend in person.

## **Do I have to participate in the group process? Can I become accredited “on my own”?**

Before the group accreditation process began in spring 2003, IABC/Chicago members went through the process by themselves. You can still do that. However, you must allow sufficient time for portfolio review and acceptance (which may require you to revise your portfolio write-ups) if you want to take the exam in Chicago next March. Portfolio samples are submitted to Olivia Nucum at IABC ([onucum@iabc.com](mailto:onucum@iabc.com) or 415.544.4721).

Well in advance of the exam date, notify IABC/Chicago’s directors of accreditation that you plan to take the exam in Chicago, so that we can arrange to have proctors and exams available.

## **Can non-members become accredited?**

Yes. However, non-members pay a \$500 accreditation fee (members pay \$290). Also, non-members are required to pay an annual administration fee of \$400 to keep their accreditation active, payable annually on the anniversary of their accreditation. IABC/Chicago membership is \$279 annually, and members receive a variety of additional benefits.

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## **What is the time frame for the IABC/Chicago group study program?**

*Conference call dates are subject to change based on participants’ availability and potential conflicts with IABC/Chicago meetings. Calls are held at noon Central time unless the group agrees to change the time.*

### **2007**

**Thursday, June 14** – Informational meeting/conference call on accreditation. E-mail either of IABC/Chicago’s accreditation directors to RSVP and/or obtain the call-in telephone number. Before the meeting, read this FAQ and other background information on the chapter and international Web sites (except, do not read the sample exams).

**Summer** – Begin developing your two portfolio submissions. If they’re complete and you want them reviewed by IABC/Chicago ABCs, contact a Director of Accreditation.

**By Sept. 1** – Send your application and check to Olivia Nucum at IABC, One Hallidie Plaza, Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94102. Check first to see if there are five or more candidates in our group study program, which makes you eligible for a 10 percent member discount.

Upon acceptance of your application, IABC will e-mail you a multiple-choice ethics quiz. Read [IABC’s Code of Ethics](#) to assist in determining your responses.

**Wednesday, Sept. 12** – Discussion on portfolio development and ethics quiz.

**Oct. 10** – If you want your portfolio reviewed by chapter ABCs, this is the deadline to send the draft write-up (not work samples) to either of the accreditation directors. Please give a heads-up to IABC/Chicago accreditation directors via e-mail before you share your narrative for review. Once you e-mail your narrative for review by IABC/Chicago ABCs, you’ll receive feedback within two weeks. You can submit one sample at a time or send them earlier, if you wish.

**Nov. 15** – Submit your portfolio to IABC. If you're crunched for time, you can check with Olivia Nucum at IABC to see if there's any leeway to this date. By submitting your portfolio in mid-November, you've given yourself time – if necessary – to adjust, resubmit and have the portfolio submission re-reviewed before the exam. If you do not meet the final deadline date, you will miss the next exam in Chicago, but can arrange to take the exam elsewhere.

**Wednesday, Dec. 5** – Conference call to cover what you should be doing while you're waiting for the portfolio results, as well as a discussion of communications trends.

## **2008**

**Wednesday, Jan. 16** – Conference call on crisis communications (take the sample oral exam before the call). Taking the sample exam as if it were "real" will enable you to develop time-saving strategies and a framework for the actual oral exam.

**Wednesday, Feb. 13** – Conference call to discuss the sample written exam (take the sample written exam before the call). Again, taking the sample exam as if it were "real" will enable you to develop time-saving strategies and a framework for the actual written exam.

**Wednesday, Feb. 27** – Conference call to discuss exam tips, logistics of the exam.

**Saturday, March 1** – Exam at DePaul University, 55 E. Jackson, 17th floor, Chicago, from approximately 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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### **Are there any stumbling blocks in the process?**

Portfolio preparation generally is the most time-consuming part of the accreditation process – and work demands often can cause delays. The best advice is to start early and get it over with so that you don't have to postpone the exam for another year.

### **If my application has been accepted, when do I send in the two portfolio samples?**

You have up to one year from the date of the application approval e-mail in which to submit the portfolio. If the year has elapsed and you are interested in proceeding with accreditation, you must resubmit an application and the fee.

### **If one area of the portfolio sample is weak or nonexistent, can I still submit it?**

*Response from Nick Durutta, ABC, Director of Portfolio Evaluators, IABC Accreditation Council, 2005*

One of the primary purposes of the accreditation portfolio – other than providing a look at the nature and scope of projects in which the candidate has been actively involved – is to see if the candidate understands the basic principles of good communication planning and has applied that understanding to their projects.

Certainly, there may be overriding circumstances that prevented one or more of those principles (such as measurement) from being applied to these projects – budget or schedule limitations, for example, or being overruled by senior management. But the candidate should still acknowledge the need for those steps to have been taken and provide an explanation for why they were not (in the "challenges" section).

Similarly, a candidate might have omitted one of the communication steps but realized belatedly that it should have been included. In this case, if the candidate describes in detail how that step could have been carried out, that should be sufficient to convey the appropriate level of knowledge. That indicates the ability to learn from the experience.

Measurement is a key step that many communicators often don't get exactly right in practice, but it should be acceptable if they can demonstrate that they understand its importance in theory. That understanding should be clearly communicated, however – not just an acknowledgment that "I learned measurement is important."

### **Does it matter how long ago the projects/work samples were completed for the portfolio?**

*Response from Mary Ann McCauley, ABC, Past Chair, IABC Accreditation Council, 2005*

There is no time limit. An older sample with solid measurement, objectives, etc. will stand the time test. However, I usually also point out that the older the material, the less likely it is to meet current expectations if it has any weaknesses, such as no or little validated measurement.

### **What if I'm not ready for the exam when it's offered in Chicago?**

You must take the exam within one year from the date of notification that your portfolio has been accepted. (Note that it can take 3-4 months to grade a portfolio submission.) Notify Olivia Nucum at IABC ([onucum@iabc.com](mailto:onucum@iabc.com) or 415.544.4721) if you want to take the exam at the next IABC International Conference or at another chapter. Exam dates are posted online at <http://www.iabc.com/abc/examdates.htm>.

### **If I don't pass the exam, can I retake it?**

If you don't pass the written and/or oral exams the first time, you have a maximum of one year to retake those sections (measured one year from the date you received your exam results). If you don't pass a second time, you have a year from that date to retake – and so on. Candidates may retake the exam as many times as necessary to pass and have a maximum of a year each time to do so. There are retake fees for each section.

Don't be embarrassed if you don't pass the entire exam the first time. More than half the candidates must retake one or more sections – often, because they simply didn't have time to complete a given section in the allotted 4-1/2 hours. IABC/Chicago has a higher "pass" rate than the national average, most likely because of our accreditation group study program.

### **Are there any materials to study?**

See the [Resources](#) list on IABC/Chicago's Web site. In particular, you might invest in a copy of the [IABC Handbook of Organizational Communication](#) (edited by Tamara Gillis, Ed.D, ABC). It

provides a comprehensive overview of topics that might come up on the exam – although you might be surprised by how much of this you already know.

In addition to this information, review communication publications and newsletters. You may want to attend workshops and seminars and chapter luncheons on key subjects, such as strategic communication planning or any of the communication disciplines or trends in which you might need a refresher.

If you're not familiar with the latest trends, technologies or operations in a communication discipline outside of your own, start to talk to people at your company or those you know at other companies – particularly IABC members. Explain what you're doing and why. You'll find that people generally are quite pleased to be asked for their expertise.

A month or two before the exam, it's helpful to take the sample oral and written exams on the IABC Web site. There are no trick questions, but you can develop some time-saving strategies if you've taken the samples in advance. (The samples are about half as long as the real thing.)

Be sure to sign up for the free monthly *ABC List*. To sign up, e-mail [ABCList-subscribe@topica.com](mailto:ABCList-subscribe@topica.com).

### **What can I do now to get a jump-start on the accreditation process?**

Review the accreditation information on [iabc.com](http://iabc.com) and [iabcchicago.com](http://iabcchicago.com), except for the sample exams, which will be discussed during a later conference call.

Determine which two projects you will submit for your portfolio, and begin writing the “overview.” This is much like an entry to a communication competition, but using the following subheadings: organization description, problem/opportunity (includes audience), developing the solution (includes objectives), selling the plan, implementing the plan (includes your role), and evaluation (link measurements with objectives). For more information on the write-up requirements, see <http://www.iabc.com/abc/abcCurrCan.htm#objectives>.

*Tip: If you have a particularly good example of a project you've submitted as an entry to a communications competition, you may be able to rework it for your portfolio sample. If you won a Gold Quill in the last year, that sample automatically is accepted within one year of winning your award – measured from the time you were notified in April.*

Complete the application and send it to IABC. (We recommend attaching your resume.)

### **I want to participate in the group approach. What should I do now?**

Contact either director of accreditation for IABC/Chicago:

- Maryellen Thielen, ABC, [mthielen@calamos.com](mailto:mthielen@calamos.com) or 630.955.4830
- Joanne Kitsos, ABC, [Joanne.Kitsos@bcbsa.com](mailto:Joanne.Kitsos@bcbsa.com) or 312.297.6643