EXPOSURE DRAFT

Statement on Standards for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Programs

Jointly Issued by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA)

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Introduction

Continuing professional education is required for CPAs to maintain their professional competence and provide quality professional services. CPAs are responsible for complying with all applicable CPE requirements, rules and regulations of state boards of accountancy, as well as those of membership associations and other professional organizations.

The Statement on Standards for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Programs (*Standards*) is published jointly by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) to provide a framework for the development, presentation, measurement, and reporting of CPE programs. The Standards were last revised in 2012.

The *Standards* are periodically reviewed in their entirety by the CPE Standards Working Group (Working Group). The Working Group is comprised of 13 members representing the various stakeholders in the CPE arena, including state boards of accountancy, state societies, educators, CPE providers, and the AICPA. If the Working Group determines that revisions or modifications are required, then the Working Group will make its recommendations to NASBA's CPE Committee (CPE Committee), which in turn makes recommendations to the Joint AICPA/NASBA CPE Standards Committee (Joint Committee). The Joint Committee will then make its recommendation to the respective AICPA and NASBA Boards of Directors. Any revisions or modifications to the *Standards* will be posted to the AICPA and NASBA websites for comment.

The *Standards* are intended to be an "evergreen" document. As questions arise related to implementation and application of the *Standards*, the questions will be presented to the Working Group. The Working Group meets quarterly and scheduled meeting dates are posted on the NASBA website, LearningMarket.org. NASBA will communicate the findings of the Working Group to the specific CPE program sponsor. Authoritative interpretations will only be issued by the CPE Committee in limited cases when the matter is not addressed in the *Standards*, cannot be addressed specifically with the CPE program sponsor, or cannot be addressed in the Best Practices web pages. All interpretations issued by the CPE Committee will be reviewed and considered by the Joint Committee upon the next revision of the *Standards*.

Preamble

01. The right to use the title "Certified Public Accountant" (CPA) is regulated by each state's board of accountancy in the public interest and imposes a duty to maintain public confidence and current knowledge, skills, and abilities in all areas in which they provide services. CPAs must accept and fulfill their ethical responsibilities to the public and the profession regardless of their fields of employment.[1]

02. The profession of accountancy is characterized by an explosion of relevant knowledge, ongoing changes and expansion, and increasing complexity. Advancing technology, globalization of commerce, increasing specialization, proliferating regulations, and the complex nature of business transactions have created a dynamic environment that requires CPAs to continuously maintain and enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

03. The continuing development of professional competence involves a program of lifelong educational activities. Continuing Professional Education (CPE) is the term used in these *Standards* to describe the educational activities that assist CPAs in achieving and maintaining quality in professional services.

04. The following *Standards* have been broadly stated in recognition of the diversity of practice and experience among CPAs. They establish a framework for the development, presentation, measurement, and reporting of CPE programs and thereby help to ensure that CPAs receive the quality CPE necessary to satisfy their obligations to serve the public interest. These *Standards* may also apply to other professionals by virtue of employment or membership. State boards of accountancy have final authority on the acceptance of individual courses for CPE credit.

05. Advances in technology, delivery and workplace arrangements may lead to innovative learning techniques. Learning theory is evolving to include more emphasis on outcome based learning. These *Standards* anticipate innovation in CPE in response to these advances. Sponsors must ensure innovative learning techniques are in compliance with the *Standard*s. CPE program sponsors are encouraged to consult with NASBA regarding questions related to compliance with the *Standards* when utilizing innovative techniques.

06. These *Standard*s create a basic foundation for sound educational programs. Sponsors may wish to provide enhanced educational and evaluative techniques to all programs.

[1] The term "CPAs" is used in these *Standards* to identify all persons who are licensed and/or regulated by boards of accountancy.

Article I - Definitions

Advanced. Program knowledge level most useful for individuals with mastery of the particular topic. This level focuses on the development of in-depth knowledge, a variety of skills, or a broader range of applications. Advanced level programs are often appropriate for seasoned professionals within organizations; however, they may also be beneficial for other professionals with specialized knowledge in a subject area.

Asynchronous. A learning activity in which the participant has control over time, place and/or pace of learning.

Basic. Program knowledge level most beneficial to CPAs new to a skill or an attribute. These individuals are often at the staff or entry level in organizations, although such programs may also benefit a seasoned professional with limited exposure to the area.

Blended learning program. An educational program incorporating multiple learning formats.

Continuing Professional Education (CPE). An integral part of the lifelong learning required to provide competent service to the public. The set of activities that enables CPAs to maintain and improve their professional competence.

CPE credit hour. Fifty minutes of participation in a program of learning.

CPE program sponsor. The individual or organization responsible for issuing the certificate of completion, and maintaining the documentation required by these *Standards*. The term CPE program sponsor may include associations of CPAs, whether formal or informal, as well as employers who offer in-house programs.

Evaluative feedback. Specific response to incorrect answers to questions in self-study programs.

Group Internet based program. Synchronous learning on an individual basis with real time interaction of an instructor or subject matter expert and built-in processes for attendance and interactivity.

Group live program. Synchronous learning in a group environment with real time interaction of an instructor or subject matter expert that provides the required elements of attendance monitoring and engagement.

Group program. Any group live or group Internet based programs.

Independent study. An educational process designed to permit a participant to learn a given subject under a learning contract with a CPE program sponsor.

Instructional methods. Delivery strategies such as case studies, computer-assisted learning, lectures, group participation, programmed instruction, use of audiovisual aids, or work groups employed in group, self-study, or independent study programs or other innovative programs.

Intermediate. Program knowledge level that builds on a basic program, most appropriate for CPAs with detailed knowledge in an area. Such persons are often at a mid-level within the organization, with operational and/or supervisory responsibilities.

Learning activity. An educational endeavor that maintains or improves professional competence.

Learning contract. A written contract signed by an independent study participant and a qualified CPE program sponsor prior to the commencement of the independent study.

Learning objectives. Specifications on what participants should accomplish in a learning activity. Learning objectives are useful to program developers in deciding appropriate instructional methods and allocating time to various subjects.

Nano-learning program. A tutorial program designed to permit a participant to learn a given subject in a ten-minute timeframe through the use of electronic media (including technology applications and processes and computer-based or web-based technology) and without interaction with a real time instructor.

Overview. Program knowledge level that provides a general review of a subject area from a broad perspective. These programs may be appropriate for professionals at all organizational levels.

Pilot test. A method to determine the recommended CPE credit for self study programs which involves sampling of at least three individuals independent of the development team and representative of the intended participants to measure the representative completion time.

Pre-program assessment. Assessment that is given before the participant has access to the course content of the program.

Professional competence. Having requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide quality services as defined by the technical and ethical standards of the profession. The expertise needed to undertake professional responsibilities and to serve the public interest.

Program of learning. A collection of learning activities that are designed and intended as continuing education and that comply with these *Standards*.

Qualified Assessment. Method of measuring the achievement of a representative number of the learning objectives of the learning activity.

Reinforcement feedback. Specific responses to correct answers to questions in self-study programs.

Self study program. An educational program completed individually without the assistance or interaction of a real time instructor.

Social learning. Learning from one's peers in a community of practice through observation, modeling and application.

Synchronous. Participants engage in learning activity(ies) at the same time.

Tutorial. A tutorial is a method of transferring knowledge that is more interactive and specific than a book, lecture or article. A tutorial seeks to teach by example and supply the information to complete a certain task.

Word count formula. A method, detailed under S17-05 Method 2, to determine the recommended CPE credit for self study programs that uses a formula including word count of learning material, number of questions and exercises, and duration of audio and video segments.

Update. Program knowledge level that provides a general review of new developments. This level is for participants with a background in the subject area who desire to keep current.

Article II – General Guidelines for CPAs

2.01 Professional Competence. All CPAs should participate in learning activities that maintain and/or improve their professional competence. [2]

Selection of learning activities should be a thoughtful, reflective process addressing the individual CPA's current and future professional plans, current knowledge and skills level, and desired or needed additional competence to meet future opportunities and/or professional responsibilities.

CPAs fields of employment do not limit the need for CPE. CPAs performing professional services need to have a broad range of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, the concept of professional competence may be interpreted broadly. Accordingly, acceptable continuing education encompasses programs contributing to the development and maintenance of professional skills.

The fields of study as published on NASBA's website, www.learningmarket.org, represent the primary knowledge and skill areas needed by CPAs to perform professional services in all fields of employment.

To help guide their professional development, CPAs may find it useful to develop a learning plan. Learning plans are structured processes that help CPAs guide their professional development. They are dynamic instruments used to evaluate and document learning and professional competence development. They may be reviewed regularly and modified as CPAs' professional competence needs change. Plans include: a self-assessment of the gap between current and needed knowledge, skills, and abilities; a set of learning objectives arising from this assessment; and learning activities to be undertaken to fulfill the learning plan.

2.02 CPE Compliance. CPAs must comply with all applicable CPE requirements.

CPAs are responsible for compliance with all applicable CPE requirements, rules, and regulations of state licensing bodies, other governmental entities, membership associations, and other professional organizations or bodies. CPAs should contact each appropriate entity to which they report to determine its specific requirements or any exceptions it may have to the standards presented herein.

Periodically, CPAs participate in learning activities which do not comply with all applicable CPE requirements, for example specialized industry programs offered through industry sponsors. If CPAs propose to claim credit for such learning activities, they must retain all relevant information regarding the program to provide documentation to state licensing bodies and/or all other professional organizations or bodies that the learning activity is equivalent to one which meets all these standards.

2.03 CPE Credits Record Documentation. CPAs are responsible for accurate reporting of the appropriate number of CPE credits earned and must retain appropriate documentation of their participation in learning activities.

To protect the public interest, regulators require CPAs to document maintenance and enhancement of professional competence through periodic reporting of CPE. For convenience, measurement is expressed in CPE credits. However, the objective of CPE must always be maintenance/enhancement of professional competence, not attainment of credits. Compliance with regulatory and other requirements mandates that CPAs keep documentation of their participation in activities designed to maintain and/or improve professional competence. In the absence of legal or other requirements, a reasonable policy is to retain documentation for a minimum of five years from the end of the year in which the learning activities were completed.

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[2] The terms "should" and "must" are intended to convey specific meanings within the context of this *Joint AICPA/NASBA Statement on Standards for Continuing Professional Education Programs.* The term "must" is used in the *Standards* applying to CPAs and CPE program sponsors to convey that CPAs and CPE program sponsors are not permitted any departure from those specific *Standards*. The term "should" is used in the *Standards* applying to both CPAs and CPE program sponsors and is intended to convey that CPAs and CPE program sponsors are encouraged to follow such *Standards* as written.

Participants must document their claims of CPE credit. Examples of acceptable evidence of completion include:

- For group, blended learning and independent study programs, a certificate or other verification supplied by the CPE program sponsor.
- For self-study and nano-learning programs, a certificate supplied by the CPE program sponsor after satisfactory completion of a qualified assessment.
- For instruction credit, appropriate supporting documentation that complies with the requirements of the respective state boards subject to the guidelines in Standard No. 20 in Standards for CPE Program Measurement.
- For a university or college course that is successfully completed for credit, a record or transcript of the grade the participant received.
- For university or college non-credit courses, a certificate of attendance issued by a representative of the university or college.
- For published articles, books, or CPE programs, (1) a copy of the publication (or in the case of a CPE program, course development documentation) that names the CPA as author or contributor, (2) a statement from the writer supporting the number of CPE hours claimed, and (3) the name and contact information of the independent reviewer(s) or publisher.

2.04 Reporting CPE Credits. CPAs who complete sponsored learning activities that maintain or improve their professional competence must claim no more than the CPE credits recommended by CPE program sponsors subject to the state board regulations.

CPAs may participate in a variety of sponsored learning activities. While CPE program sponsors determine credits, CPAs must claim credit only for activities through which they maintained or improved their professional competence. CPAs who participate in only part of a program must claim CPE credit only for the portion they attended or completed.

2.05 Independent Study. CPAs may engage in independent study under the direction of a CPE program sponsor who has met the applicable standards for CPE program sponsors when the subject matter and level of study maintain or improve their professional competence.

Independent study is an educational process designed to permit a participant to learn a given subject under the guidance of a CPE program sponsor. Participants in an independent study program must:

- Enter into a written learning contract with a CPE program sponsor that must comply with the applicable standards for CPE program sponsors. A learning contract:
  1. Specifies the nature of the independent study program and the time frame over which it is to be completed, not to exceed 15 weeks.
  2. Specifies that the output must be in the form of a written report that will be reviewed by the CPE program sponsor or a qualified person selected by the CPE program sponsor.
  3. Outlines the maximum CPE credit that will be awarded for the independent study program, but limits credit to actual time spent.

- Accept the written recommendation of the CPE program sponsor as to the number of credits to be earned upon successful completion of the proposed learning activities. CPE credits will be awarded only if:
  1. All the requirements of the independent study as outlined in the learning contract are met,
  2. The CPE program sponsor reviews and signs the participant's report,
  3. The CPE program sponsor reports to the participant the actual credits earned, and
  4. The CPE program sponsor provides the participant with contact information.

  The maximum credits to be recommended by an independent study CPE program sponsor must be agreed upon in advance and must be equated to the effort expended to improve professional competence. The credits cannot exceed the time devoted to the learning activities and may be less than the actual time involved.

- Retain the necessary documentation to satisfy regulatory requirements as to the content, inputs, and outcomes of the independent study.

Article III – Standards for CPE Program Sponsors

3.01 - General Standards

Standard No. 1. CPE program sponsors are responsible for compliance with all applicable *Standards* and other CPE requirements.

S1 - 01. CPE requirements of licensing bodies and others. CPE program sponsors may have to meet specific CPE requirements of state licensing bodies, other governmental entities, membership associations, and/or other professional organizations or bodies. Professional guidance for CPE program sponsors is available from NASBA; state-specific guidance is available from the state boards of accountancy. CPE program sponsors should contact the appropriate entity to determine requirements.

3.02 - Standards for CPE Program Development

Standard No. 2. Sponsored learning activities must be based on relevant learning objectives and outcomes that clearly articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that should be achieved by participants in the learning activities.

S2 - 01. Program knowledge level. Learning activities provided by CPE program sponsors for the benefit of CPAs must specify the knowledge level, content, and learning objectives so that potential participants can determine if the learning activities are appropriate to their professional competence development needs. Knowledge levels consist of basic, intermediate, advanced, update, and overview.

Standard No. 3. CPE program sponsors must develop and execute learning activities in a manner consistent with the prerequisite education, experience, and/or advance preparation of participants.

S3 - 01. Prerequisite education and experience. To the extent it is possible to do so, CPE program sponsors should make every attempt to equate program content and level with the backgrounds of intended participants. All programs must clearly identify prerequisite education, experience, and/or advance preparation, if any, in precise language so that potential participants can readily ascertain whether they qualify for the program.

Standard No. 4. CPE program sponsors must use activities, materials, and delivery systems that are current, technically accurate, and effectively designed. Course documentation must contain the most recent publication, revision or review date. Courses must be revised as soon as feasible following changes to relative codes, laws, rulings, decisions, interpretations, etc. Courses in subjects that undergo frequent changes must be reviewed by an individual with subject matter expertise at least once a year to verify the currency of the content. Other courses must be reviewed at least every two years.

S4 - 01. Developed by a subject matter expert. Learning activities must be developed by individuals or teams having expertise in the subject matter. Expertise may be demonstrated through practical experience and/or education.

Standard No. 5. CPE program sponsors of group, self-study, nano-learning, and/or blended learning programs must ensure learning activities are reviewed by qualified persons other than those who developed the programs to assure that the program is technically accurate and current and addresses the stated learning objectives. These reviews must occur before the first presentation of these materials and again after each significant revision of the CPE programs.

The participation of at least one licensed CPA (in good standing and holding an active license or its equivalent) is required in the development of every program in accounting and auditing. The participation of at least one licensed CPA, tax attorney, or IRS enrolled agent (in good standing and holding an active license or its equivalent) is required in the development of each program in the field of study of taxes. As long as this requirement is met at some point during the development process, a program would be in compliance. Whether to have this individual involved during the development or the review process is at the CPE program sponsor's discretion.

S5 - 01. Qualifications of reviewers. Individuals or teams qualified in the subject matter must review programs. When it is impractical to review certain programs in advance, such as lectures given only once, greater reliance should be placed on the recognized professional competence of the instructors or presenters. Using independent reviewing organizations familiar with these *Standards* may enhance quality assurance.

S5 – 02. Review responsibilities if content purchased from another entity. CPE program sponsors may purchase course content from other entities and developers. The organization that issues the certificate of completion under its name to the participants of the program is responsible for compliance with all *Standards* and other CPE requirements.

If a CPE program sponsor plans to issue certificates of completion under its name, then the CPE program sponsor must first consider whether the content was purchased from an entity registered with NASBA on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors.

- If the content is purchased from a sponsor registered with NASBA on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors, then the CPE program sponsor may maintain the author/developer and reviewer documentation from that sponsor in order to satisfy the content development requirements of the *Standards*. The documentation should be maintained as prescribed in Standard No. 24.

- If the content is purchased from an entity not registered with NASBA on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors, then the CPE program sponsor must independently review the purchased content to ensure compliance with the *Standards*. If the CPE program sponsor does not have the subject matter expertise on staff, then the CPE program sponsor must contract with a qualified individual to conduct the review. The CPE program sponsor must maintain the appropriate documentation regarding the credentials and experience of both the course author/developer(s) and reviewer(s) as prescribed in Standard No. 24.

Standard No. 6. CPE program sponsors of independent study learning activities must be qualified in the subject matter.

S6 - 01. Requirements of independent study sponsor. A CPE program sponsor of independent study learning activities must have expertise in the specific subject area related to the independent study. The CPE program sponsor must also:

- Review, evaluate, approve, and sign the proposed independent study learning contract, including agreeing in advance on the number of credits to be recommended upon successful completion.
- Review and sign the written report developed by the participant in independent study.
- Retain the necessary documentation to satisfy regulatory requirements as to the content, inputs, and outcomes of the independent study.

Standard No. 7. Group live programs must employ instructional methods that clearly define learning objectives, guide the participant through a program of learning and include elements of engagement within the program.

S7 – 01. Required elements of engagement. Each credit of CPE in a group live program must include at least one element of engagement related to course content (for example: group discussion; polling questions; instructor-posed question with time for participant reflection; and/or use of a case study with different engagement elements throughout the program).

S7 – 02. Real time instructor during program presentation. Group live programs must have a real time instructor while the program is being presented. Program participants must be able to interact with the real time instructor while the course is in progress (including the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers during the presentation). Once a group live program is recorded for future presentation, it will continue to be considered a group live program only where a real time subject matter expert facilitates the recorded presentation. CPE credit for a recorded group live program facilitated by a real time subject matter expert will be equal to the CPE credit awarded to the original presentation.

S7-03. No real time instructor during recorded program presentation. A group live program that is recorded for future presentation that does not include a real time subject matter facilitator is no longer a group live program and will only be classified as a self study program if it meets all self study delivery method requirements with the exception of the basis for CPE credit. CPE credit for a recorded group live program not facilitated by a real time subject matter expert will be equal to the CPE credit awarded to the original presentation or it may be determined by either of the two self study credit determination methodologies described in Standard No. 17: pilot testing or the prescribed word count formula, at the sponsor's discretion.

Standard No. 8. Group Internet based programs must employ instructional methods that clearly define learning objectives, guide the participant through a program of learning, and provide evidence of a participant's satisfactory completion of the program.

S8 - 01. Real time instructor during program presentation. Group Internet based programs must have a real time instructor while the program is being presented. Program participants must be able to interact with the real time instructor while the course is in progress (including the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers during the presentation). Once a group Internet based program is recorded for future presentation, it will continue to be considered a group Internet based program only where a real time subject matter expert facilitates the recorded presentation. . CPE credit for a recorded group Internet based program, facilitated by a real time subject matter expert, will be equal to the CPE credit awarded to the original presentation.

S8 – 02. No real time instructor during recorded program presentation. A group Internet based program that is recorded for future presentation that does not include a real time subject matter facilitator is no longer a group Internet based program and will only be classified as a self study program if it meets all self study delivery method requirements with the exception of the basis for CPE credit. CPE credit for a recorded group Internet based program not facilitated by a real time subject matter expert will be equal to the CPE credit awarded to the original presentation or it may be determined by either of the two self study credit determination methodologies described in Standard No. 17: pilot testing or the prescribed word count formula, at the sponsor's discretion.

Standard No. 9. Self study programs must use instructional methods that clearly define learning objectives, guide the participant through a program of learning, and provide evidence of a participant's satisfactory completion of the program.

S9 - 01. Guide participant through a program of learning. To guide participants through a program of learning, CPE program sponsors of self-study programs must elicit participant responses to test for understanding of the material. Appropriate feedback must be provided. Satisfactory completion of the program must be confirmed during or after the program through a qualified assessment.

S9 – 02. Use of review questions or other content reinforcement tools. Review questions must be placed at the end of each learning activity throughout the program in sufficient intervals to allow the participant the opportunity to evaluate the material that needs to be re-studied. If objective type questions are used, at least three review questions per CPE credit must be included or two review questions if the program is marketed for one-half CPE credits. Simulations and other innovative tools that guide participants through structured decisions can be used in lieu of review questions.

S9 – 03. Evaluative and reinforcement feedback on review questions. If the multiple choice method is used, evaluative feedback for each incorrect response must explain specifically why each response is wrong and reinforcement feedback must be provided for correct responses. If rank order or matching questions are used, then it is permissible to provide single feedback to explain the correct response. Simulations and other innovative tools that guide participants through structured decisions could provide feedback at irregular intervals or at the end of the learning experience. In those situations, single feedback would be permissible. True/false questions or other review questions that do not meet the evaluative and reinforcement feedback requirements are allowed as review questions but are not included in the number of review questions required per CPE credit. Forced choice questions, when used as part of an overall learning strategy, are allowed as review questions and can be counted in the number of review questions required per CPE credit. There is no minimum passing rate required for review questions.

S9 – 04. **Qualified assessment requirements.** To provide evidence of satisfactory completion of the course, CPE program sponsors of self-study programs must require participants to successfully complete a qualified assessment during or after the program with a cumulative minimum-passing grade of at least 70 percent before issuing CPE credit for the course. Assessments may contain questions of varying format (for example, multiple-choice, essay, and simulations). At least five questions/scored responses per CPE credit must be included on the qualified assessment or three assessment questions/scored responses if the program is marketed for one-half CPE credits. For example, the qualified assessment for a five-credit course must include at least 25 questions/scored responses. Alternatively, a five and one-half credit course must include at least 28 questions/scored responses. Except in courses where recall of information is the learning strategy, duplicate review and qualified assessment questions are not allowed. True/false questions are not permissible on the qualified assessment.

If a pre-program assessment is used in the course, then the pre-program assessment cannot be included in the determination of the recommended CPE credits for the course. If a pre-program assessment is used and feedback is provided, then duplicate pre-program assessment and qualified assessment questions are not permitted. If a pre-program assessment is used and feedback is not provided, then duplicate pre-program assessment and qualified assessment questions are permissible. Feedback may comply with the feedback for review questions as described in S9-03, or take the form of identifying correct and incorrect answers.

A qualified assessment must measure a representative number of the learning objectives for the program. A representative number of the learning objectives is 75 percent or more of the learning objectives for the program. The representative number of the learning objectives can be less than 75 percent of the learning objectives for the program only if a randomized question generator is used and the test bank used in the creation of the assessment includes at least 75 percent of the learning objectives for the program. Assessment items must be written to test the stated learning objectives of the course.

S9 – 05. Feedback on qualified assessment. Providing feedback on the qualified assessment is at the discretion of the CPE program sponsor. If the CPE program sponsor chooses to provide feedback and:

Utilizes a test bank, then the CPE program sponsor must ensure that the question test bank is of sufficient size to minimize overlap of questions on the qualified assessment for the typical repeat test-taker. Feedback may comply with the feedback for review questions as described in S9 – 03, or take the form of identifying correct and incorrect answers.

Does not utilize a test bank, whether or not feedback can be given depends on whether the participant passes the qualified assessment, then:

- on a failed assessment, the CPE program sponsor may not provide feedback to the test-taker.
- on assessments passed successfully, CPE program sponsors may choose to provide participants with feedback. This feedback may comply with the type of feedback for review questions as described in S9-03, or take the form of identifying correct and incorrect answers.

S9 – 06. Program/course expiration date. Course documentation must include an expiration date (the time by which the participant must complete the qualified assessment). For individual courses, the expiration date is no longer than one year from the date of purchase or enrollment. For a series of courses to achieve an integrated learning plan, the expiration date may be longer.

S9 – 07. Based on materials developed for instructional use. Self study programs must be based on materials specifically developed for instructional use and not on third party materials. Self study programs requiring only the reading of general professional literature, IRS publications, or reference manuals followed by a test will not be acceptable. However, the use of the publications and reference materials in self-study programs as supplements to the instructional materials could qualify if the self study program complies with each of the CPE standards.

Instructional materials for self study include teaching materials which are written for instructional educational purposes. These materials must demonstrate the expertise of the author(s). At a minimum, instructional materials must include the following items:

1. An overview of topics;
2. The ability to find information quickly (for example, an index, a detailed menu or key word search function);
3. The definition of key terms (for example, a glossary or a search function that takes a participant to the definition of a key word);
4. Instructions to participants regarding navigation through the course, course components, and course completion;
5. Review questions with feedback; and
6. Qualified assessment.

Standard No. 10. Nano-learning programs must use instructional methods that clearly define a minimum of one learning objective, guide the participant through a program of learning and provide evidence of a participant's satisfactory completion of the program. Satisfactory completion of the program must be confirmed at the conclusion of the program through a qualified assessment.

S10 – 01. Qualified assessment requirements. To provide evidence of satisfactory completion of the course, CPE program sponsors of nano-learning programs must require participants to successfully complete a qualified assessment with a passing grade of 100 percent before issuing CPE credit for the course. Assessments may contain questions of varying format (for example, multiple choice, rank order, and matching). Only two questions must be included on the qualified assessment. True/false questions are not permissible on the qualified assessment. If the participant fails the qualified assessment, then the participant must re-take the nano-learning program. The number of re-takes permitted a participant is at the sponsor's discretion.

S10 – 02. Feedback on qualified assessment. Providing feedback on the qualified assessment is at the discretion of the CPE program sponsor. If the CPE program sponsor chooses to provide feedback and:

Utilizes a test bank, then the CPE program sponsor must ensure that the question test bank is of sufficient size for no overlap of questions on the qualified assessment for the typical repeat test-taker. If the multiple choice method is used, evaluative feedback for each incorrect response must explain specifically why each response is wrong and reinforcement feedback must be provided for correct responses. If rank order or matching questions are used, then it is permissible to provide single feedback to explain the correct response. Feedback may also take the form of identifying correct and incorrect answers.

Does not utilize a test bank, whether or not feedback can be given depends on whether the participant passes the qualified assessment, then:

- on a failed assessment, the CPE program sponsor may not provide feedback to the test-taker.
- on assessments passed successfully, CPE program sponsors may choose to provide participants with feedback. This feedback may comply with the type of feedback described in the preceding paragraph or take the form of identifying correct and incorrect answers.

S10 – 03. Program/course expiration date. Course documentation must include an expiration date. The expiration date is no longer than one year from the date of purchase or enrollment.

S10 – 04. Based on materials developed for instructional use. Nano-learning programs must be based on materials specifically developed for instructional use and not on third party materials. Nano-learning programs requiring only the reading of general professional literature, IRS publications or reference manuals followed by an assessment will not be acceptable.

Standard No. 11. Blended learning programs must use instructional methods that clearly define learning objectives and guide the participant through a program of learning. Pre-program, post-program and/or homework assignments should enhance the learning program experience and must relate to the defined learning objectives of the program.

S11 – 01. Guide participant through a program of learning. The blended learning program includes different learning or instructional methods (for example, lectures, discussion, guided practice, reading, games, case study, simulation); different delivery methods (group live, group Internet based, nano-learning or self study); different scheduling (synchronous or asynchronous); or different levels of guidance (for example, individual, instructor or subject matter expert led, or group/social learning). To guide participants through the learning process, CPE program sponsors must provide clear instructions/information to participants that summarize the different components of the program and what must be completed or achieved during each component in order to qualify for CPE credits. The CPE program sponsor must document the process/components of the course progression and completion of components by the participants.

S11 – 02. Primary component of blended learning program is a group program. If the primary component of the blended learning program is a group program, then CPE credits for pre-program, post-program and/or homework assignments cannot constitute more than 25 percent of the total CPE credits available for the blended learning program.

S11 – 03. Primary component of blended learning program is an asynchronous learning activity. If the primary component of the blended learning program is an asynchronous learning activity, then the group program component of the blended learning program must incorporate a qualified assessment in which participants demonstrate achievement of the learning objectives of the program.

S11 – 04. Qualified assessment requirements. A qualified assessment must measure a representative number of learning objectives for the program. A representative number of the learning objectives is 75 percent or more of the learning objectives for the program.

3.03 - Standards for CPE Program Presentation

Standard No. 12. CPE program sponsors must provide descriptive materials that enable CPAs to assess the appropriateness of learning activities. For CPE program sponsors whose courses are developed for sale and/or for external audiences (i.e., not internal training), CPE program sponsors must make the following information available in advance:

- **Learning objectives.**
- **Instructional delivery methods.**
- **Recommended CPE credit and recommended field of study.**
- **Prerequisites.**
- **Program level.**
- **Advance preparation.**
- **Program description.**
- **Course registration requirements.**
- **Refund policy for courses sold for a fee/cancellation policy.**
- **Complaint resolution policy.**

- **Official NASBA sponsor statement, if an approved NASBA sponsor (explaining final authority of acceptance of CPE credits).**

For CPE program sponsors whose courses are purchased or developed for internal training only, CPE program sponsors must make the following information available in advance:

- **Learning objectives.**
- **Instructional delivery methods.**
- **Recommended CPE credit and recommended field of study.**
- **Prerequisites.**
- **Advance preparation.**
- **Program level (for optional internal courses only).**
- **Program description (for optional internal course only).**

S12 – 01. Disclose significant features of program in advance. For potential participants to effectively plan their CPE, the program sponsor must disclose the significant features of the program in advance (e.g., through the use of brochures, website, electronic notices, invitations, direct mail, or other announcements). When CPE programs are offered in conjunction with non-educational activities, or when several CPE programs are offered concurrently, participants must receive an appropriate schedule of events indicating those components that are recommended for CPE credit. The CPE program sponsor's registration and attendance policies and procedures must be formalized, published, and made available to participants and include refund/cancellation policies as well as complaint resolution policies.

S12 – 02. Disclose advance preparation and/or prerequisites. CPE program sponsors must distribute program materials in a timely manner and encourage participants to complete any advance preparation requirements. All programs must clearly identify prerequisite education, experience, and/or advance preparation requirements, if any, in the descriptive materials. Prerequisites, if any, must be written in precise language so that potential participants can readily ascertain whether they qualify for the program.

Standard No. 13. CPE program sponsors must ensure instructors are qualified with respect to both program content and instructional methods used.

S13 – 01. Qualifications of instructors. Instructors are key ingredients in the learning process for any group or blended learning program. Therefore, it is imperative that CPE program sponsors exercise great care in selecting qualified instructors for all group or blended learning programs. Qualified instructors are those who are capable, through training, education, or experience of communicating effectively and providing an environment conducive to learning. They must be competent and current in the subject matter, skilled in the use of the appropriate instructional methods and technology, and prepared in advance.

S13 - 02. Evaluation of instructor's performance. CPE program sponsors should evaluate the instructor's performance at the conclusion of each program to determine the instructor's suitability to serve in the future.

Standard No. 14. CPE program sponsors must employ an effective means for evaluating learning activity quality with respect to content and presentation, as well as provide a mechanism for participants to assess whether learning objectives were met.

S14 - 01. Required elements of evaluation. The objectives of evaluation are to assess participant and instructor satisfaction with specific programs and to increase subsequent program effectiveness. Evaluations, whether written or electronic, must be solicited from participants and instructors for each program session, including self study and nano-learning programs, to determine, among other things, whether:

- Stated learning objectives were met.
- Stated prerequisite requirements were appropriate and sufficient.
- Program materials were relevant and contributed to the achievement of the learning objectives.
- Time allotted to the learning activity was appropriate.
- Individual instructors were effective. (Note: This topic does not need to be included in evaluations for self study and nano-learning programs.)

S14 - 02. Evaluation results. CPE program sponsors must periodically review evaluation results to assess program effectiveness and should inform developers and instructors of evaluation results.

Standard No. 15. CPE program sponsors must ensure instructional methods employed are appropriate for the learning activities.

S15 - 01. Assess instructional method in context of program presentation. CPE program sponsors must assess the instructional methods employed for the learning activities to determine if the delivery is appropriate and effective.

S15 – 02. Facilities and technology appropriateness. Learning activities must be presented in a manner consistent with the descriptive and technical materials provided. Integral aspects in the learning environment that should be carefully monitored include the number of participants and the facilities and technologies employed in the delivery of the learning activity.

3.04 - Standards for CPE Program Measurement

Standard No. 16. Sponsored learning activities are measured by actual program length, with one 50-minute period equal to one CPE credit. Sponsors may recommend one-fifth (0.20 credit equal to 10-minute period) and one-half (0.50 credit equal to 25-minute period) CPE credits under the following scenarios:

- **Group – after the first credit has been earned.**
- **Self study – one-half increments (equal to 25 minutes) are permitted.**
- **Nano-learning – one-fifth increments (equal to 10 minutes) are permitted.**

The CPA claiming CPE credits should refer to respective state board requirements regarding acceptability of one-fifth and one-half CPE credits.

Only learning content portions of programs (including pre-program, post-program and/or homework assignments when incorporated into a blended learning program) qualify toward eligible credit amounts. Time for activities outside of actual learning content including, for example, excessive welcome and introductions, housekeeping instructions, and breaks is not accepted toward credit.

S16 – 01. Learning activities with individual segments. For learning activities in which individual segments are less than 50 minutes, the sum of the segments would be considered one total program. For example, five 30-minute presentations would equal 150 minutes and would be counted as three CPE credits. When the total minutes of a sponsored learning activity are greater than 50, but not equally divisible by 50, the CPE credits granted must be rounded down to the nearest one-fifth credit, if one-fifth credits are awarded. Thus, learning activities with segments totaling 140 minutes would be granted two and four-fifths CPE credits.

For learning activities in which segments are classified in multiple fields of study, the CPE credits granted should first be computed based on the content time of the total program. Next, the CPE credits granted should be allocated to the fields of study based on the field of study content time. If the sum of the individual segments by field of study content time does not equal the CPE credits computed based on the content

time for the total program, then the difference (positive or negative) should be allocated to the primary field of study for the program.

S16 – 02. Responsibility to monitor attendance. While it is the participant's responsibility to report the appropriate number of credits earned, CPE program sponsors must maintain a process to monitor individual attendance at group programs to assign the correct number of CPE credits. A participant's self-certification of attendance alone is not sufficient.

S16 – 03. Monitoring mechanism for group Internet based programs. In addition to meeting all other applicable group program standards and requirements, group Internet based programs must employ some type of real time monitoring mechanism to verify that participants are participating during the duration of the course. The monitoring mechanism must be of sufficient frequency and lack predictability to provide assurance that participants have been engaged throughout the program. The monitoring mechanism must employ at least three instances of interactivity completed by the participant per CPE credit. CPE program sponsors should verify with respective state boards on specific interactivity requirements.

S16 – 04. **Small group viewing of group Internet based programs.** In situations where small groups view a group Internet based program such that one person logs into the program and asks questions on behalf of the group, documentation of attendance is required in order to award CPE credits to the group of participants. Participation in the group must be documented and verified by the small group facilitator or administrator in order to authenticate attendance for program duration.

S16 – 05. University or college credit course. For university or college credit courses that meet these CPE Standards, each unit of college credit shall equal the following CPE credits:

- Semester System 15 credits
- Quarter System 10 credits

S16 – 06. University or college non-credit course. For university or college non-credit courses that meet these CPE standards, CPE credit shall be awarded only for the actual classroom time spent in the non-credit course.

S16 – 07. Participant preparation time. Credit is not granted to participants for preparation time, unless the program meets the criteria for blended learning in Standard No. 11.

S16 – 08. Committee or staff meetings qualification for CPE credits. Only the portions of committee or staff meetings that are designed as programs of learning and comply with these *Standards* qualify for CPE credit.

Standard No. 17 CPE credit for self study learning activities must be based on one of the following educationally sound and defensible methods:

Method 1: Pilot test of the representative completion time.

Method 2: Computation using the prescribed word count formula.

If a pre-program assessment is used, the pre-program assessment is not included in the CPE credit computation.

S17 – 01. Method 1 - Sample group of pilot testers. A sample of intended professional participants must be selected to test program materials in an environment and manner similar to that in which the program is to be presented. The sample group must consist of at least three qualified individuals who are independent of the program development group.

- For those courses whose target audience includes CPAs, the sample group must be licensed CPAs in good standing, holding an active license or its equivalent and possess the appropriate level of knowledge before taking the program.
- For those sponsors who are subject to various regulatory requirements that mandate a minimum number of CPE credits and offer courses to non-CPAs, those courses do not have to be pilot tested by licensed CPAs.
- For those courses whose target audience includes CPAs and non-CPAs, the sample group must be representative of the target audience and contain both CPAs, as defined above, and non-CPAs.

S17 – 02. Method 1 – CPE credit based on representative completion time. The sample does not have to ensure statistical validity; however, if the results of pilot testing are inconsistent, then the sample must be expanded or , if the inconsistent results are outliers, the inconsistent results must be eliminated. CPE credit must be recommended based on the representative completion time for the sample. Completion time includes the time spent taking the final examination and does not include the time spent completing the course evaluation or pre-program assessment. Pilot testers must not be informed about the length of time the program is expected to take to complete. If substantive changes are subsequently made to program materials, further pilot tests of the revised program materials must be conducted to affirm or amend, as appropriate, the representative completion time.

S17 – 03. Method 1 – Requirement for re-pilot testing. If, subsequent to course release, actual participant completion time warrants a change in CPE credit hours, re-pilot testing is required to substantiate a change in CPE credit prospectively.

S17 – 04. Method 1 – Pilot testing when course is purchased from vendor or other developer. CPE program sponsors may purchase courses from other vendors or course developers. For purchased courses where pilot tests were conducted and provided, CPE program sponsors must review results of the course developer's pilot test results to ensure that the results are appropriate. For purchased courses where no pilot tests were conducted or provided, CPE program sponsors must conduct pilot testing or perform the word count formula as prescribed in Method 2.

S17 – 05. Method 2 – Basis for prescribed word count formula. The prescribed word count formula begins with a word count of the number of words contained in the text of the required reading of the self study program and should exclude any material not critical to the achievement of the stated learning objectives for the program. Examples of information material that are not critical and therefore excluded from the word count are: course introduction; instructions to the participant; author/course developer biographies; table of contents; glossary; pre-program assessment; and appendices containing supplementary reference materials.

Again, only course content text that is critical to the achievement of stated learning objectives should be included in the word count formula. If an author/course developer determines, for example, that including the entire accounting rule or tax regulation is beneficial to the participant, the accounting rule or tax regulation should be included as an appendix to the course as supplementary reference material and excluded from the word count formula. Only pertinent paragraphs or sections of the accounting rule or tax regulation required for the achievement of stated learning objectives should be included in the actual text of the course and therefore included in the word count formula.

Review questions, exercises and qualified assessment questions are considered separately in the calculation and should not be included in the word count.

S17 – 06. Method 2 – Calculation of CPE credit using the prescribed word count formula. The word count for the text of the required reading of the program is divided by 180, the average reading speed of adults. The total number of review questions (including those above the minimum requirements), exercises and qualified assessment questions is multiplied by 1.85, which is the estimated average completion time per question. These two numbers plus actual audio/video duration time (not narration of the text), if any,

are then added together and the result divided by 50 to calculate the CPE credit for the self study program. When the total minutes of a self study program are not equally divisible by 50, the CPE credits granted must be rounded down to the nearest one-half credit.

[(# of words/180) + actual audio/video duration time + (# of questions * 1.85)] /50 = CPE credit

S17 – 07. Method 2 – Consideration of audio and video segments in word count formula. If audio and video segments of a self study program constitute additional learning for the participant (i.e., not narration of the text), then the actual audio/video duration time may be added to the time calculation as provided in the prescribed word count formula. If the entire self study program constitutes a video, then the prescribed word count formula in S17 – 06 would consist of the actual video time plus the total number of review questions (including those above the minimum requirements), exercises and qualified assessment questions multiplied by 1.85 divided by 50 (i.e., there would be no word count for text used in the formula).

[actual audio/video duration time + (# of questions * 1.85)] /50 = CPE credit

S17 – 08. Method 2 – Word count formula when course is purchased from vendor or other developer. CPE program sponsors may purchase courses from other vendors or course developers. For purchased courses where the word count formula was calculated, CPE program sponsors must review the results of the course developer's word count formula calculation to ensure that results are appropriate. For purchased courses where the word count formula calculation was not performed or provided, CPE program sponsors must perform the word count formula calculation or conduct pilot testing as described in Method 1.

Standard No. 18. CPE credit for nano-learning programs must be based on duration of the program plus the qualified assessment, which when combined should be a minimum of 10 minutes. However, one-fifth (0.20 credit) CPE credit is the maximum credit to be awarded for a single nano-learning program.

Standard No. 19. CPE credit for blended learning programs must equal the sum of the CPE credit determinations for the various completed components of the program. CPE credits could be determined by actual duration time (for example, audio/video duration time or learning content delivery time in a group program) or by a pilot test of the representative completion time as prescribed in S17-01 or word count formula as prescribed in S17-06 (for example, reading, games, case studies, simulations).

Standard No. 20. Instructors, discussion leaders or technical reviewers of learning activities may receive CPE credit for their preparation/review and presentation time to the extent the activities maintain or improve their professional competence and meet the requirements of these *Standards*.

S20 – 01. Instructor CPE credit parameters. Instructors, discussion leaders, or speakers who present a learning activity for the first time may receive CPE credit for actual preparation time up to two times the number of CPE credits to which participants would be entitled, in addition to the time for presentation, subject to regulations and maximums established by the state boards. For example, for learning activities in which participants could receive 8 CPE credits, instructors may receive up to 24 CPE credits (16 for preparation plus 8 for presentation). For repeat presentations, CPE credit can be claimed only if it can be demonstrated that the learning activity content was substantially changed and such change required significant additional study or research.

S20 – 02. Presenting a program. The CPA claiming CPE credits should refer to respective state board requirements.

S20 – 03. Technical reviewer CPE credit parameters. Technical reviewers who review a learning activity for the first time may receive CPE credit for actual review time up to the actual number of CPE credits for

the program, subject to regulations and maximums established by state boards. For repeat technical reviews, CPE credit can be claimed only if it can be demonstrated that the learning activity content was substantially changed and such change required significant additional study or research.

Standard No. 21. Writers of published articles, books, or CPE programs may receive CPE credit for their research and writing time to the extent it maintains or improves their professional competence.

S21 – 01. Requirement for review from independent party. Writing articles, books, or CPE programs for publication is a structured activity that involves a process of learning. For the writer to receive CPE credit, the article, book, or CPE program must be formally reviewed by an independent party. CPE credits should be claimed only upon publication.

S21 – 02. Authoring a program. As a general rule, receiving CPE credits for authoring and presenting the same program should not be allowed. The CPA claiming CPE credits should refer to respective state board requirements.

Standard No. 22. CPE credits recommended by a CPE program sponsor of independent study must not exceed the time the participant devoted to complete the learning activities specified in the learning contract.

S22 – 01. CPE credits agreed to in advance. The maximum credits to be recommended by an independent study CPE program sponsor must be agreed upon in advance and must be equated to the effort expended to improve professional competence. The credits cannot exceed the time devoted to the learning activities and may be less than the actual time involved.

3.05 - Standards for CPE Program Reporting

Standard No. 23. CPE program sponsors must provide program participants at or after the conclusion of the program with documentation (electronic or paper) of their participation (certificate of completion), which includes the following:

- **CPE program sponsor name and contact information.**
- **Participant's name.**
- **Course title.**
- **Course field of study.**
- **Date offered or completed.**
- **If applicable, location.**
- **Type of instructional/delivery method used.**
- **Amount of CPE credit recommended.**
- **Verification by CPE program sponsor representative.**
- **Sponsor identification number or registration number, if required by the state boards.**
- **NASBA time statement stating that CPE credits have been granted on a 50-minute hour.**
- **Any other statements required by state boards.**

S23 – 01. Entity to award CPE credits and acceptable documentation. The CPE program sponsor is the individual or organization responsible for issuing the certificate of completion and maintaining the documentation required by these *Standards*. The entity whose name appears on the certificate of completion is responsible for validating the CPE credits claimed by a participant. CPE program sponsors must provide participants with documentation (electronic or paper) to support their claims of CPE credit. Acceptable evidence of completion includes:

- For group, blended learning and independent study programs, a certificate or other verification supplied by the CPE program sponsor.
- For self-study and nano-learning programs, a certificate supplied by the CPE program sponsor after satisfactory completion of a qualified assessment.

- For instruction credit, appropriate supporting documentation that complies with the requirements of the respective state boards subject to the guidelines in Standard 20 in Standards for CPE Program Measurement.
- For a university or college course that is successfully completed for credit, a record or transcript of the grade the participant received.
- For university or college non-credit courses, a certificate of attendance issued by a representative of the university or college.
- For published articles, books, or CPE programs, (1) a copy of the publication (or in the case of a CPE program, course development documentation) that names the CPA as author or contributor, (2) a statement from the writer supporting the number of CPE hours claimed, and (3) the name and contact information of the independent reviewer(s) or publisher.

S23-02. Certificate issuance for simultaneous delivery of a group live and group internet based program. In circumstances where the CPE program sponsor is providing simultaneous delivery of a group live and group Internet based program, the CPE program sponsor, at its discretion, may issue the certificate of completion to all program participants by awarding CPE credits under the instructional delivery method attended by the majority of the participants. The delivery and attendance monitoring requirements of the respective instructional delivery methods still apply.

Standard No. 24. CPE program sponsors must retain adequate documentation (electronic or paper) for a minimum of five years to support their compliance with these standards and the reports that may be required of participants.

S24 – 01. Required documentation elements. Evidence of compliance with responsibilities set forth under these standards which is to be retained by CPE program sponsors includes, but is not limited to:

- Records of participation.
- Dates and locations.
- Author/instructor, author/developer and reviewer, as applicable, names and credentials. For the CPA and tax attorney acting as an author/instructor, author/developer and reviewer for accounting, auditing or tax program(s), the state of licensure, license number and status of license should be maintained. For the enrolled agent acting in such capacity for tax program(s), information regarding the enrolled agent number should be maintained.
- Number of CPE credits earned by participants.
- Results of program evaluations.
- Program descriptive materials (course announcement information).

Information to be retained by CPE program sponsors includes copies of program materials, evidence that the program materials were developed and reviewed by qualified parties, and a record of how CPE credits were determined.

S24 – 02. Maintenance of documentation as basis for CPE credit for self study programs. For CPE program sponsors using Method 1 (pilot tests) as the basis for CPE credit for self study programs, appropriate pilot test records must be retained regarding the following:

- When the pilot test was conducted.
- The intended participant population.
- How the sample of pilot testers was selected.
- Names and credentials and relevant experience of sample pilot test participants.
- A summary of pilot test participants' actual completion time.
- Statement from each pilot tester to confirm that the pilot tester is independent from the course development group and that the pilot tester was not informed in advance of the expected completion time.

For CPE program sponsors using Method 2 (word count formula) as the basis for CPE credit for self study programs, the word count formula calculation as well as the supporting documentation for the data used in

the word count formula (e.g., word count; number of review questions, exercises and final examination questions; duration of audio and/or video segments, if applicable; and actual calculation) must be retained.

Effective dates:

Unless otherwise established by state licensing bodies and/or other professional organizations, these Standards are to be effective upon Board approval except as follows:

1. For group live programs , instances of engagement per S7-01 must be incorporated during the next CPE program review/revision date.