

Programmatic Accreditation Standards

Revised February 2017

Institutions have two years to comply with newly adopted Standards for Accreditation.

Programmatic Accreditation Conditions of Eligibility

To be considered for programmatic accreditation, an institution must fulfill the requirements stated in the Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation.

1. The programs to be accredited will be in biblical/theological and ministry formation-related areas.
2. In the U.S., an institution will be required to have institutional accreditation with a CHEA- and/or USDE-recognized agency in order to apply for programmatic accreditation. In Canada, the institution must present evidence of appropriate governmental approval, prior institutional accreditation with ABHE, or a formal affiliation with a recognized Canadian University.
3. **Institutional mission.** The objectives for programs to be accredited by ABHE are within the scope of the institutional mission or purpose.
4. **Catalog.** An institution must have available to students and the public a current and accurate catalog setting forth the institution's governance, mission, institutional goals, specific objectives, academic program requirements and courses, learning and educational resources, admissions policies and standards, rules and regulations for conduct, full- and part-time faculty rosters with faculty degrees, fees and other charges, refund policies, a policy defining satisfactory academic progress, and other items related to attending, transferring to, or withdrawing from the institution. Claims regarding education effectiveness must be supported by appropriate data. The type of accreditation held with ABHE, detailing the programs accredited, must be included anywhere ABHE accreditation is cited.
5. **Assessment and public accountability.** An institution must make information available to the public concerning student achievement and institutional performance outcomes, including graduation rates and rate of recent graduate employment in program related occupations.
6. **Learning resources.** An institution must ensure access to resources necessary to support courses, programs, and degrees accredited by ABHE.
7. **Biblical/theological studies.** Programs to be accredited will satisfy the minimum requirement for biblical/theological studies as specified in the Standards for Accreditation.
8. **Ministry formation program.** An institution must require that undergraduate students in programs to be accredited participate in a program of ministry formation.
9. **Agency disclosure.** An institution must agree to disclose to the Commission on Accreditation any and all such information as it may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.
10. **Compliance.** An institution must commit itself to comply with the Standards for Accreditation of its institutional accrediting association as well as ABHE's Programmatic Accreditation Standards, either current or as hereafter modified during the period of its affiliation.

11. **Public disclosure.** An institution must attest in writing that it understands and agrees that the Commission on Accreditation may, at its discretion, make known to any agency or member of the public the nature of any action, positive or negative, regarding its program's status with the Commission on Accreditation.

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Programmatic Accreditation Standards

Standard 1 OBJECTIVES

The program has specific objectives that reflect the institutional mission and goals and lead to the development of church related ministries.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. Clearly articulated and publicized objectives for each educational program that support institutional mission and goals.

Standard 2 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING AND PLANNING

The program demonstrates that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its objectives and improve performance through a regular, comprehensive, and sustainable system of assessment and planning. Central to this plan is the systematic and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures the student's knowledge, skills, and competencies against institutional goals and programmatic objectives.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. The identification of appropriate integrated student outcomes in the context of institutional goals, program objectives and course objectives.
2. A shared commitment on the part of students, faculty, staff, administration, and governing board to achieve these stated outcomes.
3. A written plan of ongoing outcomes assessment that articulates multiple means to validate expected learning outcomes and that is subjected to a periodic review process.
4. Criteria appropriate to the higher education credential to be awarded for evaluating success with respect to student achievement and to the level of education.
5. Validation, as a result of using the outcomes assessment plan, that students are achieving the stated outcomes relative to institutional goals, program-specific objectives, and course objectives.
6. A process whereby these outcome measurements lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.
7. A planning process for the improvement of the program's objectives and services.
8. A system for monitoring program progress in achieving planning goals.
9. The ongoing provision of reliable information to the public regarding program performance and student achievement, including graduation and employment rates.

Standard 3 INTEGRITY

The program demonstrates Christian integrity in all of its practices and relationships, with strict adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. Institutional and program-related publications (including the catalog, see Condition of Eligibility 4), websites and other web presence, statements, and advertising that describe accurately and fairly the institution, its academic programs, its admissions requirements, its transfer credit policies and criteria, its articulation agreements, and its effectiveness claims.
2. Honest and open communication regarding compliance with agencies such as accrediting, licensing, and governing bodies.
3. Fulfillment of all applicable standards, policies, and requirements of the ABHE Commission on Accreditation.
4. Integrity in all financial matters and in compliance with applicable legal and governmental regulations.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on the Conferral of Honorary Doctoral Degrees; Policy on Ethical Practices; Policy on Falsification of Data; Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

STANDARD 4 AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

Standard 4 not applicable to programmatic accreditation review.

Standard 5 ADMINISTRATION

The program has a core of administrators to bring together its various resources and allocate them to accomplish objectives by implementing policies and structures in collaboration with appropriate constituencies.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS:

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. A clearly documented organizational structure appropriate to the size and scope of the program in the context of the institution as a whole.
2. Administrative leaders with education, experiences, and competencies appropriate to the discharge of their duties and to the level of education offered in the program.
3. Complete, accurate, and securely maintained administrative records.
4. A procedure and practice for ongoing review and enhancement of the performance of administrators.

Standard 6 PROGRAM RESOURCES

The program has the human, financial, physical, and technological resources needed to achieve its objectives and has implemented policies and procedures to manage these resources effectively.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS:

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. An adequate number of qualified personnel to provide basic services to students, faculty, and administration.
2. An organizational climate that encourages job satisfaction, collegiality, and respect among personnel.
3. Adequate financial and physical resources to ensure achievement of educational goals.
4. Evidence that facilities, equipment, and supplies are adequate to support the institutional mission, to achieve the educational goals, and to ensure continuity of offerings.
5. Appropriate technology to support the program's educational and operational effectiveness.
6. Systematic allocation of resources to maintain current and support future technological capacity.
7. Ongoing training and support for technology personnel and users, including staff and students.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Semi-Autonomous Institutions]

Standard 7 ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The program utilizes procedures designed to effectively recruit, admit, and retain qualified students.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. Recruitment strategies that are directed toward students whose spiritual commitment, goals and interests are consistent with program objectives.
2. Accurate and sufficient recruitment information to enable prospective students to make informed decisions.
3. Evaluation procedures that reasonably ensure admitted students have attained the requisite educational level and possess the ability to achieve their educational goals successfully.
4. Published policies and procedures related to transfer credit and prior learning, including public disclosure of criteria used to evaluate transfer credit and a list of institutions or programs with which the institution has established articulation agreements.
5. An assessment process that measures and improves student retention and completion.

Standard 8 STUDENT SERVICES

The program provides services that contribute to the holistic development and care of students and that are appropriate to the level of education and delivery system.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. A commitment to the spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development of students that is consistent with biblical higher education.
2. Services that meet the needs of students, regardless of location or instructional delivery system.
3. Leadership development facilitated by curricular and/or co-curricular programs that are integrated with the educational objectives.
4. Opportunities for students to provide input in programmatic decision-making.
5. Published procedures for and records of addressing formal student complaints and grievances.

Standard 9 FACULTY

The program maintains a faculty committed to the institutional mission and program objectives and qualified academically and spiritually to facilitate student learning within their disciplines and to contribute to the development of a biblical worldview. The program fosters an academic climate that stimulates the exchange of ideas, encourages professional development, promotes the well-being of faculty, and supports the faculty's role in decision-making.

9a. FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS, DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. A spiritually mature faculty who engage in modeling and mentoring relationships with students.
2. Faculty members who possess earned degrees from institutions accredited by agencies recognized by either the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the U. S. Department of Education or by the appropriate provincial government. (Exceptions to faculty credential requirements should be limited and validated by professional vitae.)
3. Undergraduate faculty who have earned a minimum of a master's degree and who teach in an area of documented expertise.
4. Graduate faculty who have an earned terminal or appropriate professional doctoral degree and teach in an area of documented expertise.
5. Appropriate documentation of its faculty's academic preparation and professional expertise, including official transcripts, official documentation of professional experience, performance and technical competencies, published documents, and other certifications and qualifications.
6. Systems for evaluating and improving the instructional effectiveness of all faculty.
7. Evidence of faculty contribution in the areas of student learning, scholarship, institutional and program development, ministry, and community service.

8. Support for the professional advancement and development of faculty including the pursuit of terminal degrees.
9. A published statement of academic freedom and adherence to its principles within the context of the institutional mission.

9b. FACULTY DECISION MAKING

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. A core faculty of sufficient size and expertise, responsible for the fulfillment of the program objectives, and responsible for the quality of its academic functions.
2. A clear and publicized statement of faculty-adopted requirements for graduation that is consistently applied to the certification of graduates.
3. A faculty that is involved in academic-related decision-making processes especially related to admissions criteria, curriculum, and student development.

Standard 10 LIBRARY AND OTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

The program ensures the availability of and access to learning resources and services of appropriate form, range, depth, and currency to support the curricular offerings and meet student and faculty needs, regardless of location or instructional delivery system.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. Sufficient funding, staff, facilities, technology, and practices to procure and maintain needed learning resources and services for all instructional modalities used by the program.
2. The availability of library services (reference, technical, and circulation) and other means to meet research and information needs of students and faculty.
3. Joint participation of librarians and faculty in curriculum planning, the analysis of resource adequacy, the selection of resource materials, and the development of library policy.
4. Evaluation of learning resource utilization by the learning community.

Standard 11 ACADEMICS

The program is appropriate to the achievement of the institutional mission and to the level being offered, specifically for service in church-related ministry and supporting development of a biblical worldview.

11a. CURRICULUM

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. Evidence that academic programs exhibit the content and rigor characteristic of higher education, and a level of analytical research and communication skills needed for life-long learning commensurate with the level of education offered.
2. A written statement of program-specific student outcomes for each academic program and a coherent program of study to achieve the student outcomes.
3. Evidence that the integration of curricular components supports development of a biblical worldview.
4. A program taught with sensitivity to the cultural context in which students serve or may serve.
5. A process of regular review by faculty to ensure that curricular objectives for each academic program are being realized.
6. Evidence that course sequence progresses from foundational to advanced studies appropriate to the degree and level of education offered.
7. A curriculum content and level of education appropriate to the degree offered.
8. Appropriate distinctions between levels of study within the context of student classifications, faculty qualifications, and learning methodologies.

Relative to this standard, an accredited undergraduate program is characterized by...

9. A minimum of 120 semester hours (180 quarter hours) for a baccalaureate degree, and a minimum of 60 semester hours (90 quarter hours) for an associate degree.
10. A core of Bible/theology studies equivalent to 30 semester hours (45 quarter hours) for a four- or five-year baccalaureate degree, 24 semester hours (36 quarter hours) for a Canadian three-year baccalaureate degree, 18 semester hours (27 quarter hours) for a non-traditional degree completion program or transfer students needing fewer than 60 semester hours (90 quarter hours) to complete a baccalaureate degree, and 12 semester hours (18 quarter hours) for an associate degree or one- or two-year certificate program.
11. A core of general studies equivalent to 30 semester hours (45 quarter hours) for a baccalaureate degree or 15 semester hours (24 quarter hours) for an associate degree, with one or more courses drawn from each of the following four disciplines: Communication, Humanities/Fine Arts, Natural Science/Mathematics, and Social/Behavioral Sciences.
12. A core of professional studies equivalent to a minimum of 18 semester hours (27 quarter hours) for a baccalaureate degree, which are selected to equip students for professional positions or ministry service.
13. The delineation of expectations for ministry-oriented and professionally-oriented programs that include practical experiences and applied knowledge through practicums, internships, or other appropriate means.

[Applicable Policies: Policy Concerning Adult Degree Completion Programs; Concerning the Conferring of Honorary Doctoral Degrees; Policy on Biblical and Theological Studies; Policy on Canadian Institution Degree Programs; Policy on General Studies; Policy on International Education Programs; Policy on Two-Year Programs]

Relative to this standard, an accredited graduate program is characterized by...

14. A minimum of 30 semester hours (45 quarter hours) for a graduate degree.
15. Curricula and resources to support programs that foster progressively more advanced student educational achievement and more effective ministry/leadership than undergraduate education.

16. Curricula providing for the development of research and independent thinking at an advanced level and/or appropriate level of professional practices.
17. Programs that ensure students develop and demonstrate significant ability to think biblically in relation to their academic or professional disciplines through prerequisites, curricular requirements, or program-level learning outcomes.
18. Appropriate pre-requisite and/or curricular requirements to ensure that students are capable of pursuing advanced studies in the discipline.
19. A culture of learning that cultivates critical thinking, theological reflection, spiritual formation, and effective ministry or professional practice.
20. The delineation of expectations for ministry-oriented and professionally-oriented programs that include practical experiences and applied knowledge through practicums, internships or other appropriate means.

11b. MINISTRY FORMATION

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited undergraduate program (and a graduate program that features field education) is characterized by . . .

1. A culture and programs that promote development of effective witnesses and servants in the church and the world at large.
2. An educational philosophy in which ministry formation is viewed as an integral part of the student's education.
3. A program of supervision that provides an adequate basis for evaluating and guiding students in the pursuit of their professional goals.
4. A system of ongoing program review and assessment of outcomes that results in program improvement.
5. Evidence that academic credit given for practicums, internships, or other practical learning experiences, if awarded, is warranted.

11c. ACADEMIC PATTERNS AND PROCEDURES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .

1. An academic advising system that guides the student from the point of selection of a program to graduation from that program.
2. An academic calendar that meets state, provincial, and federal regulations and considers regional higher educational patterns.
3. The award of academic credit commensurate with normative academic and/or governmental definitions that may be based upon intended learning outcomes.
4. A system of accurate and secure record keeping consistent with state, provincial, and/or federal regulations.
5. A system of grading and associated policies and procedures that reflects integrity, ensures fairness and consistency, conforms to higher education norms, and facilitates transportability of students' academic credits.

11d. ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC PATTERNS**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

Relative to this standard, an accredited institution's academic programs utilizing off-campus locations, distance education, or alternative academic patterns are characterized by . . .

1. Evidence that courses and programs offered in alternative academic patterns are consistent with other offerings of the institution.
2. Adequate staffing, facilities, and technology to support programs in all delivery modes.
3. Appropriate measures required of students participating in distance and/or correspondence education to ensure that the student receiving credit is in fact the person completing the work.

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