Call for Comments – April 2020

PROPOSED CHANGES

Policy on Ethical Practices

Key to Changes: Delete, Add

It is the intent of the Association for Biblical Higher Education to express the ethical ideals of the Christian faith in all of its practices and to require that all member institutions or programs follow sound principles of integrity.

Commission on Accreditation (COA) Practices

1. ABHE’s COA considers for accreditation only those institutions and programs that have as their primary purpose the preparation of students for Christian ministries emphasize biblical and theological studies as well as preparation for Christian life and ministry (vocational or avocational).

2. ABHE’s COA considers an institution or program only upon the request of its chief administrative officer and permits the withdrawal of the request at any time prior to action by the COA.

3. ABHE’s COA selects evaluation team members on the basis of their competence as educators, their ability to assess programs of biblical higher education, their absence of conflicts of interest, and their acceptability to the institution or program to be evaluated. No individual can serve as both consultant and evaluator for an institution or program during a given cycle of accreditation.

4. ABHE’s COA follows sound evaluation procedures that ensure: (1) thoroughness and accuracy in the securing of information, (2) good communication at every point among all parties involved in the process, (3) due regard for the protection of an institution with respect to the confidentiality of documents and reports, (4) ethical and professional practices of evaluators during, preceding, and following the visit, (5) non-acceptance of honoraria by COA representatives from an institution (except for scheduled fees) during an institution’s or program’s accreditation process, (6) expeditious handling of steps in the accreditation process, (7) an absence of conflicts of interest within decision-making bodies, (8) prompt notification of commission actions on
membership status, including the reasons for action, and (9) complete and accurate records, including at least the last full review, of the accreditation process of each institution or program and all actions taken regarding its status with the COA.

5. ABHE’s COA seeks to conduct its activities with a view to economy of operation and reasonable cost to its institutions.

6. ABHE’s COA avoids showing favoritism in the endorsement of vendors seeking entry into the biblical higher education market. The Association reserves the right to inform its members of advantageous services and products. Such information is not to be considered an endorsement.

Institutional Practices

1. **Policy on description of credentials offered.** In their public documents, institutions will carefully and accurately define the nature and use of each certificate, diploma, and degree awarded. Such definitions must be consistent with the institutional or programmatic mission, the specifications of ABHE Standards, the requirements of state regulatory bodies, and accepted conventions among recognized institutions of higher education.

2. **Policy on the acceptance of transfer credit.** Responsibility for sound practices in accepting transfer credits rests primarily on member institutions and programs. However, since practices of individual institutions and programs affect the prestige and standing of the entire association, ABHE has taken action to endorse the Statement on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit ratified September 28, 2001 endorsed by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). See the Policy on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit and the Policy on Validating Credits Earned at Unaccredited Institutions for additional guidance.

3. **Transfer of students.** Christian comity, as well as professional ethics, requires an institution to honor the disciplinary actions taken by other institutions. Accordingly, the status of a student’s withdrawal will be verified before his the application is accepted, and if the withdrawal is dishonorable, the application will not be accepted unless a satisfactory disposition is made consider the action and subsequent life circumstances. Discretion should be exercised in considering applications from students who have not succeeded academically. In most
cases, a student who cannot make acceptable grades in another institution setting will also fail in an institution of biblical higher education.

4. Identification of Commission on Accreditation status: accredited and candidate. Each member institution or program is responsible in its advertising and in all official statements to make clear whether its status with the COA is at the accredited, or candidate, or applicant level. Usually a simple statement such as the following will suffice: “(institution or program name) is accredited by the COA of ABHE” or “(institution name) is a candidate for accreditation with the COA of ABHE.” Whenever the status is identified in advertising or public documents, it should include the COA’s address and phone number. See the Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment and Representation of Accredited Status for acceptable language in accreditation statements.

If accreditation does not extend to the entire institution, as denoted by its legal or customary title, but extends only to a particular unit or programs within the institution, all publicity will clearly indicate the limits of such accreditation.

5. Use of emblem. The Association emblem may be used by both accredited and candidate institutions, but the latter must always use the term “Candidate for Accreditation” immediately below the emblem proper.

5. Reference to educational boards and agencies. If reference is made to publications by the U.S. Department of Education, the proper wording is “listed by” because the U.S. Department of Education does not accredit institutions. If reference is made by states or Canadian provinces, the wording should be appropriate to the usage of the particular governmental body. For example, in New York, curricula are “registered.” In many states, institutions are “approved” with respect to their total program; in many they are “accredited,” or “certified” or “recognized” only with respect to their teacher education program.

6. Description of Bachelor of Theology program. It is important to describe the five-year Bachelor of Theology program as an undergraduate program and the degree as an undergraduate degree. This conforms to ABHE policy and will help distinguish the B.Th. as a three-year program resting upon a two-year liberal arts foundation from the B.D./M.Div. program as a three-year curriculum resting upon a four-year liberal arts base.

7. Accuracy in advertising. All published materials relating to the courses programs offered, physical equipment, scholastic standing of faculty members,
financial reports, statements of student fees and charges, and similar topics will be such as will accurately portray the institution and program to the public and will be descriptive of what the student will actually encounter when he/she enters the institution. **Members Institutions** are not to mislead the public by presenting themselves as some other type of institution. **Currently offered programs must be clearly distinguished from future plans.** Published lists of enrollment will clearly distinguish resident institution or program-credit students from noncredit and distance education enrollees where appropriate. All financial reports must be strictly accurate and free from misleading claims. Institutions and programs are requested to refrain from the use of superlatives when describing themselves. It is not in good taste to exalt one’s institution or program in such a way that it reflects on the program, quality, or prestige of another Christian institution.

8. **Refunds.** ABHE institutions must have an equitable refund policy under which they will make refunds of unearned tuition, required fees, and room and board charges (where paid to the institution) to students who do not matriculate or do not complete the period of study for which payment has been made.

9. **Financial operations.** ABHE institutions must maintain a high level of integrity in their financial operations, including the preparation and availability to the public of the latest statement of financial activities.

10. **Transfer of faculty and staff members.** ABHE members institutions will exercise due courtesy and practice Christian comity toward one another in the transfer of faculty or staff members. Faculty or staff members will be free to correspond with other institutions regarding positions; in this case, the administration approached is not under obligation to notify the administration of the current employing institution. Likewise, it is not considered a breach of comity for administrators of one institution to initiate inquiries directly with faculty or staff members of another institution. However, in this latter case, Christian courtesy demands that the administration of the correspondent be informed of the overture before a firm offer is extended.

11. **Dismissal of faculty or staff members.** ABHE members institutions will provide a fair and reasonable process and exercise Christian charity in the dismissal of faculty and staff members. If performance has been unsatisfactory, the member will be counseled and given a reasonable opportunity to improve his performance before dismissal action is taken. Where dismissal is necessitated by financial constraints or cutbacks in institutional programs, reasonable efforts
should be made to minimize hardships and assist the member in relocating. Where dismissal action is contemplated because of alleged violations of moral or ethical standards, every effort will be made to ascertain the truth of the allegations before action is taken. In taking dismissal action, institutions will demonstrate Christian love for the individual and respect for his privacy.

12. Retirement obligations. It is considered a violation of this policy for institutions to dismiss faculty or staff members for the purpose of voiding retirement obligations.

13. Inter-institutional competition. ABHE institutions and programs will have the right to compete in the academic marketplace for both students and funds. In so competing, they will consider their stewardship responsibilities and will seek to maximize the use of scarce resources for the advancement of Christ’s cause. It is doubtful that good stewardship is exercised when one institution establishes offerings at some distance from its own campus in close geographical proximity to another member having a similar theological persuasion and scope of offerings. Should an institution or program decide to establish such offerings, it will notify the local ABHE members institutions of its intentions prior to implementation of the distant offerings. Further, it will refrain from making presumptions about the availability of local institutional resources, such as the library, for use by its own students. In all cases, it will secure the local institution’s or program’s prior agreement for such use.

14. Nondiscrimination. ABHE institutions or programs will practice nondiscrimination on the basis of gender (as permitted ecclesiastically and theologically), race, disability or national origin. This fact will be stated in the catalog and other relevant literature. The following sample notice of nondiscrimination meets the minimum requirements of the regulations enforced by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR):

The (Name of Recipient) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (as permitted ecclesiastically and theologically), disability, or age in its programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: (Name and/or Title), (Address), (Telephone Number).
15. Discontinuation of an academic Degree program cancellation. ABHE institutions and programs are responsible to be sufficiently adept at institutional planning that weak degree programs can be phased out over time rather than being cancelled abruptly. When trends indicate that a program does not have long-range viability, advertisement and recruitment for that program should cease so that freshmen will not enroll in it. The institution or program, however, retains the obligation to see students enrolled in the program through to the completion of the degree program. Should emergency circumstances demand immediate cancellation of a program, the institution has the obligation to facilitate the transfer of students to institutions where the degree program is offered. Students should not be inconvenienced by an institution’s decision to cancel a program abruptly.