

## Overview of Accreditation with ABHE

Accreditation is a process by which an institution evaluates its educational activities and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it achieves its mission and goals and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions or specialized units.

The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) Commission on Accreditation (COA) is recognized as a national, faith-based accrediting agency by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to accredit institutions and programs in the United States, Canada, and related territories that offer certificates, diplomas, associate, baccalaureate, or graduate degrees aimed at preparing students for Christian ministries through Biblical, church-vocational, and general studies. The ABHE Commission on Accreditation is also recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a national, specialized, institutional accrediting agency. The official scope of recognition is as follows: The accreditation and preaccreditation of institutions of biblical higher education in the United States offering undergraduate certificates, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, graduate certificates, and master's degrees, including the accreditation of educational programs offered via distance education.

### Types of ABHE Accreditation

*Institutional Accreditation:* Review and recognition of an entire institution, both undergraduate and graduate programs.

*Programmatic Accreditation:* Review and recognition of specific programs within an institution that currently holds institutional accreditation with another recognized accreditor.

### Philosophy of ABHE Accreditation

COA offers programmatic accreditation to institutions that are in accord with the Association's Tenets of Faith. Programmatic accreditation is granted to institutions that offer specific programs that meet the requirements of biblical higher education and lead to credentials in biblical and theological studies as well as specific ministry-related careers and that satisfactorily demonstrate substantial compliance with the COA's Conditions of Eligibility and its Standards for Accreditation.

Although accreditation signifies substantial compliance with the Commission on Accreditation's Standards, it is designed to foster ongoing systematic self-study with the goal of continuous institutional improvement. ABHE-accredited institutions are expected to affirm, updating as needed, their statements of mission; examine the evidence for the achievement of their respective missions and goals; identify areas of strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat; and develop plans to address issues identified. The ultimate goal of this process is to better equip institutions to prepare students for a life of service to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Progression to Programmatic Accreditation

The following information highlights elements of the accreditation process and is not intended to be a comprehensive description. Additional detail is found in the Commission on Accreditation (COA) Manual, available at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>. Note especially the Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation.

- The Commission considers programmatic applications on a rolling basis:
  - December 15 deadline for February Commission review
  - May 15 deadline for June Commission review
  - September 15 deadline for November Commission review

The institution should submit one electronic copy (pdf) of the following documents to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org) for consideration:

1. A completed ABHE programmatic application form or a Letter of Request stating your intention to move to programmatic accreditation, if currently accredited institutionally with ABHE.
2. An official letter from the chief executive officer stating the CEO/board of control's desire for the institution to pursue programmatic accreditation with the ABHE Commission.
3. A document demonstrating compliance with the Programmatic Conditions of Eligibility. The document should describe the compliance with each requirement and provide documentation of compliance in appendices at the end of the narrative.
4. An invoice for the application fee will be emailed once documentation has been received.

### Self-Study

If the institution shows sufficient compliance with the Programmatic Conditions of Eligibility, an evaluation team will be authorized by COA to conduct a 2–3-day visit to the institution. Self-study materials consist of a compliance document demonstrating each program's compliance with ABHE's programmatic standards. The assessment plan and planning documents should be up to date and include the programs to be considered. These documents are due eight weeks prior to the team visit.

A three-member team will interview various personnel (including faculty, board, and students), examine documents, and submit a report for review by the institution and the COA. The institution is expected to provide a response to the evaluation team report, indicating steps taken or to be taken to address areas where the team found compliance with the Standards and Essential Elements has not been adequately demonstrated.

The COA will review these documents and interview institutional representatives at the February COA meeting before making a decision on programmatic status.

### Accredited Status

Programmatically accredited institutions submit to periodic review as part of their recognition. Normally, the Commission will review the covered programs(s) every ten years for reaffirmation of accreditation; however, the Commission reserves the right to review a program at any time based upon information coming to its attention. Certain changes (adding programmatically accredited programs, additional locations, etc.) are significant enough that institutions must submit a substantive change proposal for COA review.

## **Begin Your Programmatic Accreditation Journey with ABHE**

Application information, an application, and accreditation manuals are available for download without charge at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>. The most important of these documents is the Commission on Accreditation (COA) Manual, which contains all the Standards, policies, and procedures of the COA. Most questions can be answered by reviewing the *COA Manual*. If you have additional questions, please contact the Commission office at [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org).

### **Expenses**

Expenses related to pursuit of accreditation take three forms: (1) direct expenses paid to ABHE for membership dues and accreditation services, (2) indirect expenses for institutional personnel devoting time to preparations for accreditation, and (3) expenses for professional development (ABHE annual meeting, conferences on accreditation, etc.). The institution's budget should reflect the investment in programmatic accreditation services. A current fee schedule is provided at the end of this document and at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents> to help institutions project expenses for Commission on Accreditation dues and fees and ABHE association membership dues.

### **Resources for the Journey**

***Commission on Accreditation Manual (COA Manual)*** – complete record of ABHE Standards for Accreditation, policies and procedures. The *Manual* should be your first stop in looking for answers about ABHE accreditation <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>.

***Self-Study Guide*** – a step-by-step guide to the preparation of a self-study and hosting an evaluation team visit. The *Self-Study Guide* suggests strategies, processes, and organization to make the preparations for a team visit easier <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>.

***Evaluation Team Handbook*** – intended primarily for evaluators, this tool can be a helpful reference in understanding what teams are instructed to look for when conducting an on-site visit at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>. Team training videos are also available to the public at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/team-evaluator-training/>.

***ABHE Annual Conference*** – the premiere gathering of 500+ leaders engaged in biblical higher education. The February conference in Orlando offers plenary sessions around a central theme, concurrent workshops organized into multiple professional tracks, fellowship times to network with other ABHE institutions with mutual interests, pre-conference workshops and training opportunities for more in-depth professional development, and an exhibit hall to explore resources and services across the spectrum of institutional operations.

For information on conferences, please visit [www.abhe.org/leadership-development/leadership-development-conferences](http://www.abhe.org/leadership-development/leadership-development-conferences).



## ABHE Tenets of Faith

According to the Constitution of the Association for Biblical Higher Education, the following statement of faith is to be subscribed to annually by each member institution.

- *We believe that there is one God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
- *We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.*
- *We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious atonement through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal and visible return in power and glory.*
- *We believe that man was created in the image of God, and that he was tempted by Satan and fell, and that, because of the exceeding sinfulness of human nature, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for salvation.*
- *We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by Whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life, and by Whom the Church is empowered to carry out Christ's great commission.*
- *We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the lost; those who are saved unto the resurrection of life and those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.*

On behalf of the institution's governing board, I affirm that the institution subscribes to the ABHE Tenets of Faith as stated above.

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President/CEO's Name and Title (please print)

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Signature

Date

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Institution



## **ABHE CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY** *for Programmatic Accreditation*

To be considered for programmatic accreditation, an institution must fulfill the requirements stated in the Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation and satisfy the following Conditions of Eligibility:

1. **Tenets of Faith.** The institution's board of control affirms agreement with and commitment to the ABHE Tenets of Faith, as evidenced by a copy of the Tenets of Faith signed annually by the chief executive officer of the institution.
2. **Nonprofit Status.** Evidence that the institution is a nonprofit organization or the nonprofit subsidiary of a parent organization.
3. **Programs of Study.** The programs to be accredited will be in biblical/theological and ministry formation-related areas.
4. **Institutional Accreditation.** 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.
5. **Institutional mission.** The objectives for programs to be accredited by ABHE are within the scope of the institutional mission or purpose.
6. **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, nondiscrimination statement, 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.
7. **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.

8. **Learning resources.** An institution must ensure access to library and learning resources necessary to support courses, programs, and degrees accredited by ABHE.
9. **Biblical/theological studies.** Programs to be accredited will satisfy the minimum requirement for biblical/theological studies as specified in the Standards for Accreditation.
10. **Ministry formation program.** An institution must require that undergraduate students in programs to be accredited participate in a program of ministry formation.
11. **Agency disclosure.** An institution must agree to disclose to the Commission on Accreditation (COA) any and all such information as it may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.
12. **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.
13. **Public disclosure.** An institution must attest in writing that it understands and agrees that the COA 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 COA.
14. **Arbitration.** An institution must agree in writing to submit any dispute involving the final denial, withdrawal, or termination of accreditation to initial arbitration prior to any other legal action.



## TYPICAL TIMELINE FOR PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION

*By November 15 of each year, an online annual report must be completed and an external financial audit with auditor's management letter and academic catalog(s) submitted to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org).*

### APPLICATION:

2022	Dec. 15	Programmatic Accreditation Application and supporting documents submitted to <a href="mailto:coa@abhe.org">coa@abhe.org</a>
2023	February	Commission decision on readiness for an evaluation team visit for programmatic accreditation status
2023	Summer	Self-study due 8 weeks prior to evaluation team visit
	Fall	2-day programmatic evaluation team visit to campus
	Late Fall	Response to team visit report due 6 weeks after report is received
2024	February	The COA will review the self-study and reports and interview institutional representatives at the February COA meeting before making a decision on programmatic status.

### PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION REAFFIRMED (10 years):

2033	January	Self-study for 10-year reaffirmation visit due 8 weeks before visit
2033	Spring	2-3 day programmatic evaluation team visit to campus for reaffirmation
2033	Summer	Response to visiting team report due September 15
2034	February	Commission decision on reaffirmation of programmatic accreditation

(Reaffirmation cycle repeats every 10 years)

## ASSOCIATION

**Dues** (billed in **September**; due and payable within 30 days):

- **Accredited (Institutional and Programmatic), Candidate, Applicant Institutions:**
- Variable rate of \$13.50 multiplied by the unduplicated headcount enrollment (all students in all deliveries, last fiscal year, as reported on the Fall Annual Report) **Minimum: \$3,240 | Maximum: \$10,800**

## COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION

**COA Dues** (billed in **March**; due and payable within 30 days):

- **Accredited (Institutional and Programmatic), Candidate, Applicant Institutions:**  
Flat rate of \$3,100 per institution

**Evaluation Fees** (billed when visit is scheduled; due and payable within 30 days):

- **Candidate Status, Initial Accreditation, Reaffirmation Team Visit (4-6 persons):**  
Evaluation team fee of \$5,000 plus evaluator travel expenses
- **Focused Visit (2-3 persons):**  
Evaluation team fee of \$2,500 plus evaluator travel expenses

**Staff Visit Fees** (billed when visit is scheduled; due and payable within 30 days):

- **Preliminary Staff Visit:**  
\$2,000 plus travel expenses for a 1-day visit by a Commission staff representative (required during the 24 months prior to submission of an application)
- **Staff Visit:**  
\$2,000 plus travel expenses for a one-day visit by a Commission staff representative; \$1000 per subsequent day (extended visit, if requested by the institution), plus travel expenses
- **Additional Location/Relocation Visit:**  
\$750 plus travel expenses

**Substantive Change Fee** (Accredited and Candidate Institutions)

- \$500 per submission, non-refundable. The fee will be invoiced to the school after the substantive change proposal has been received and recorded. All fees are due 30 days from the invoice date.

### **Late Fees**

- A \$25 per business day fee will be charged to institutions that do not submit all required documents by the specified due date, including (Annual Report components, audit, catalog, progress reports, self-study, etc.).
- Required documents that are due by November 15<sup>th</sup> and not received by December 31<sup>st</sup> will be charged an additional \$500.
- Required documents that are due by May 15<sup>th</sup> or September 15<sup>th</sup> and are not received by the end of the month will be charged an additional \$300.

See the Report Guide for detailed information at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>.

### **Application Fee**

- \$4,000, non-refundable (no application will be processed prior to application fee payment).

### **CHEA Membership Fee**

- Variable rate fee is billed directly by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to all ABHE member institutions (typically \$275-\$600). For more information visit [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)

### **Termination of Status**

- The Commission on Accreditation may terminate Accredited, Candidate or Applicant status for failure to pay membership dues within 30 days of invoice. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested in writing.