2023
COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION
MANUAL
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Introduction

Biblical Higher Education

In the late nineteenth century, a movement began that has had a profound influence on evangelical Protestantism. Its impact has been felt in every part of the world, producing a large percentage of North American evangelical missionaries and serving as a primary educational enterprise for local church development. This religious development was the Bible institute movement, which later evolved into the Bible college movement.

From the humble beginnings of the Missionary Training Institute (Nyack College) in New York City in 1882 to the launching of such schools as Moody Bible Institute in 1886 and Toronto Bible School (Tyndale University College & Seminary) in 1894, the Bible college movement has proliferated throughout North America.

More than 130 years after the first Bible school was started, there are more than 1200 Bible schools and colleges in the United States and Canada. Approximately 160 of these institutions have a relationship with the Association for Biblical Higher Education, either through accreditation or association membership. Many of these institutions still bear a resemblance to their forbears. For example, the current curriculum of undergraduate institutions accredited by ABHE still includes a core of biblical and theological studies along with general studies (liberal arts) and professional studies. Coursework is supplemented with ministry field education and service learning opportunities through which students apply what they have learned in the classroom. Furthermore, the ethos of these institutions can still be described as academically rigorous, evangelical, discipleship-oriented, and focused on spiritual and ministry formation.

Most institutions of biblical higher education offer programs in biblical studies, pastoral ministry, Christian education, cross-cultural missions, and music. Many also provide programs in elementary and secondary education, youth ministries, urban ministries, and business administration. Others offer specialized programs in such areas as deaf ministries, social work, aviation, and other technology-oriented fields. Increasing numbers of biblical higher education institutions offer curricula across a broad spectrum of academic and professional disciplines.

Institutions in the Bible college tradition continue to earn additional forms of accreditation or (in Canada) provincial university recognition. Many Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) institutions now hold dual accreditation with the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) and another nationally recognized accrediting agency (e.g., SACSCOC, MSCHE, HLC, WASC). A growing number of these institutions have also established their own seminaries and graduate divisions. In short, institutions of biblical higher education have achieved widespread and growing credibility and currency within the larger academic community.

One of the most significant developments in the growth of the Bible college movement was the founding of the Accrediting Association of Bible Institutes and Bible Colleges in 1947. The name was shortened in 1957 to the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges. It was changed in 1973 to the American Association of Bible Colleges before being changed back to the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges in 1994 to more accurately represent the geographic purview of
the Association that included institutions in Canada, the United States and related territories. In 2004, the name was changed to the Association for Biblical Higher Education to reflect its expansion of scope with graduate education accreditation and programmatic accreditation. Adoption of a new Constitution and Bylaws in 2009 designates the organization's present name as: The Association for Biblical Higher Education in Canada and the United States.

ABHE’s mission is to advance quality in biblical higher education for Kingdom impact. The purpose of ABHE’s Commission on Accreditation is to assure quality and integrity among biblical higher education institutions through accreditation services empowered by peer review. ABHE membership is voluntary, and accreditation by the COA is limited to institutions that demonstrate substantial compliance with the COA Standards for Accreditation.

Recognition
The Association for Biblical Higher Education’s Commission on Accreditation (COA) is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) as a national, specialized, institutional accrediting agency. ABHE was among the first institutions to receive recognition when USDE began recognizing accrediting agencies in 1952. The agency’s official scope of USDE recognition (primarily for the purpose of participation in U.S. Title IV financial aid programs) is as follows: The accreditation and pre-accreditation (“Candidate Status”) of institutions of biblical higher education offering undergraduate certificates, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, graduate certificates, and master’s degrees, including the accreditation of educational programs offered via distance education and direct assessment. USDE recognition extends as well to ABHE’s candidate institutions. COA accredited and candidate institutions are recognized by the Department of Justice, the Veteran’s Administration, and other relevant federal agencies in the United States.

The COA is also recognized as a national, faith-related accrediting agency by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the successor of the Council on Postsecondary Education (COPA) and, subsequently, the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary accreditation (CORPA). The agency’s official scope of CHEA recognition is as follows: 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.

ABHE is also a sponsoring member agency of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), the official theological education partner entity of the World Evangelical Alliance. ICETE is a global community comprising eight continental/regional quality assurance agencies and networks of theological schools.

Incorporated in the State of Illinois as a not-for-profit corporation, ABHE is exempt from income tax under the provisions of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation is governed by its accredited and candidate institutions through the COA Delegate Assembly which elects members of the COA decision-making body.
at an annual business meeting. Accreditating decisions are made by the COA. The COA’s public accountability is underscored by the requirement that the COA must include public representatives among its members. The COA is administered by a full-time Executive Director with the support of additional professional and support staff.

**Institutional Accreditation**
The COA’s process of accreditation involves three stages whereby institutions proceed from applicant to candidate and, finally, to accredited status.

**Applicant Status** is a COA pre-membership status granted to those institutions that meet the COA’s Conditions of Eligibility and that possess such qualities as might provide a basis for achieving candidate status within a maximum of five years. Applicant institutions are required to submit annual reports demonstrating progress toward candidate status. During Year 3, an institutional self-study (including a compliance document, assessment plan, institutional improvement plan, and supporting documents) are submitted to the COA for review prior to an evaluation team visit to assess the institution’s readiness for candidate status.

**Candidate Status** is a preaccredited status granted to those institutions that show promise of achieving accreditation within a maximum of five years. Candidate institutions are required to submit annual progress reports demonstrating progress toward accreditation. During Year 3, self-study materials are submitted to the COA for review prior to an evaluation team visit to assess the institution’s readiness for initial accreditation.

**Accredited status** is granted to those institutions that substantially meet or exceed the COA’s Institutional Accreditation Standards and give evidence of continuous improvement. During Year 5 of initial accreditation, an institutional self-study is submitted to the COA office prior to an evaluation team visit to consider reaffirmation of the institution’s accreditation. Once reaffirmed, the institution will repeat the reaffirmation process every ten years.

For additional information on the accreditation process see the Policy and Procedures for Institutional Accreditation in this manual.

**Programmatic Accreditation**
The COA provides programmatic accreditation for institutions whose missions include programs outside the scope of biblical higher education. Nonetheless, these institutions 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. Programmatic accreditation indicates that specific program offerings meet standards of excellence in biblical higher education. A programmatic accreditation review requires that the institution offering such programs meet certain conditions of eligibility. In the United States, these conditions include a requirement that the institution holds institutional accreditation with a recognized accrediting body. 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. Institutions seeking programmatic accreditation must demonstrate that the programs
to be considered are included in the institution’s assessment and planning processes. They must also present documentation that the programs are in compliance with ABHE programmatic accreditation Standards. Programmatic accreditation is granted for a period of ten years. While the COA monitors the programs offered on an annual basis, programs are subject to the renewal of accreditation on a ten-year cycle.

Programmatic accreditation is within ABHE’s official scope of recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Programmatic accreditation is not included in ABHE’s recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

For additional information on the accreditation process see the Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation in this manual.

**Philosophy of Accreditation**

ABHE offers accreditation to institutions that are in accord with the Association’s Tenets of Faith and that have mission statements appropriate to biblical higher education. Accreditation is granted to institutions that satisfactorily demonstrate substantial compliance with the ABHE Conditions of Eligibility and 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.

**Principle for Accreditation**

An institution of biblical higher education must demonstrate that it is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its mission and the Standards for Accreditation. It must also demonstrate its commitment to ongoing institutional development.

When the standard requires a policy statement, the policy will be 1) expressed in writing, 2) approved by appropriate bodies, 3) distributed to appropriate personnel, and 4) subject to periodic evaluation. Failure to meet these four conditions will constitute partial or non-compliance with the standard.

For additional information see the Policy on Academic Quality as Related to Institutional Mission.
Institutions have two years to comply with newly adopted Standards for Accreditation.
Institutional Accreditation

Conditions of Eligibility

To be considered for institutional accreditation, an institution must fulfill the requirements stated in the Policy and Procedures for Institutional 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. **Authorization.** An institution must document authorization from the appropriate governmental agency (if required) to operate as an educational institution and to grant all degrees, certificates, and diplomas that it awards.

4. **Institutional mission.** An institution must have a clear statement of mission as well as formally adopted and widely publicized institutional goals that are in accord with the Association’s definition of biblical higher education.

5. **Governance.** An institution must have an external governing board of at least five members that has the authority to oversee the accomplishment of the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution.

6. **Chief executive officer.** An institution must have a chief executive officer who has the capacity and authority to lead the institution toward the accomplishment of its mission.

7. **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 educational effectiveness must be supported by appropriate data.

8. **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.
9. **Learning resources.** An institution must ensure access to library and learning resources necessary to support courses, programs, and degrees offered.

10. **Faculty qualifications.** An institution must have qualified academic leadership and at least one qualified faculty member for each major or program offered. The oversight of the program may be by the same individual as the faculty member.

11. **Academic programs.** An institution must offer one or more educational programs that are at least two academic years in length and are consistent with the mission of the institution and appropriate to higher education.

12. **Biblical/theological studies.** An institution must meet, in all its programs, the minimum requirement for biblical/theological studies as specified in the Standards for Accreditation.

13. **General studies.** An institution must meet, in all its programs, the minimum requirement for general studies as specified in the Standards for Accreditation.

14. **Ministry formation program.** An institution must require that undergraduate students participate in a program of ministry formation.

15. **Student body.** An institution must have sustained and viable student enrollment in its education programs over the past two years (typically an FTE of 10 or headcount of 30 students or more).

16. **Program completion.** An institution must have graduated at least one student in its principal program by the time of the committee’s decision regarding applicant status.

17. **Admissions policy.** An institution must have an admissions policy that is compatible with its stated institutional mission and programs offered.

18. **Institutional stability and capacity.** An institution must demonstrate a pattern of stability in enrollment, governing board, administration, faculty, and finances. For new applicants, the institution must demonstrate the capacity for development into an accredited institution within ten years.

19. **Financial base.** An institution must have a financial base indicating that the institution can achieve its mission and goals within a balanced budget and at a safe level of debt.

20. **Income allocation.** An institution must devote a substantial and sufficient portion of its generated income to the support of its educational purposes and programs.

21. **Annual audit.** An institution must have financial records that receive an annual, independent, opinioned audit.
22. **Agency disclosure.** An institution must agree to disclose to the association any and all such information as it may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.

23. **Compliance.** An institution must commit itself to comply with the Association’s Standards for Accreditation, either current or as hereafter modified, during the period of its affiliation.

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

25. **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.

* * *
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 1
MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The institution has a written mission statement that is clear and appropriate to biblical higher education supported by clearly defined institutional goals and student learning objectives.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. A clearly written mission statement appropriate to biblical higher education.
2. Evidence that the mission statement is developed and periodically reviewed by broad representation from all sectors of the institution and ratified by the governing board.
3. Evidence that the mission statement guides faculty, staff, administration, and the governing board in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, and program development.
4. Clearly articulated institutional goals that directly relate to the mission statement.
5. Clearly articulated student learning objectives for each educational program that support fulfillment of the mission statement.
6. The mission statement, institutional goals, and student learning objectives are easily located on the institution’s website and in its catalog(s).
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 2
ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

The institution demonstrates that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its mission, fulfill goals and objectives, and improve institutional effectiveness through an ongoing system of assessment and planning.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. A written, comprehensive assessment plan that describes what data (qualitative and/or quantitative) the institution gathers to demonstrate fulfillment of institutional goals and student learning objectives and how and when data are gathered in an ongoing and structured way.

2. Clearly defined and measurable student learning outcomes that support mission fulfillment accompanied by metrics or other means that effectively assess whether or not the institution is achieving its stated objectives.

3. Student learning outcomes appropriate to the higher education credential to be awarded (certificate, associate, baccalaureate, master's, and/or doctoral study).

4. Use of multiple means to validate student learning outcomes.

5. Ongoing assessment of operations and services to evaluate the extent to which these functions are effective in supporting mission fulfillment and improving institutional effectiveness.

6. Meaningful analysis of assessment data and use of results by appropriate constituencies in a clearly documented, ongoing planning process for the purpose of improvement in teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness.

7. A written, comprehensive institutional improvement plan based on assessment results and aligned with realistic resource projections.

8. The ongoing provision of reliable information to the public regarding institutional performance and student achievement, including graduation rates and employment rates for graduates of professional programs. Such outcomes data must be available via the institution’s website through an easily identified link on the homepage.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 3
INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The institution demonstrates 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 institution is characterized by . . .

1. Institutional publications (including the catalog, see Condition of Eligibility 7), websites and other media/online 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. Handbooks that describe and govern various institutional relationships with students, faculty, staff, and board, including appropriate policies, processes, and grievance procedures.

3. Evidence of effective policies that address protection of student privacy, transparency in safety and on-campus crime, and provision for redress of harassment (including sexual harassment) that might be experienced by institutional stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, faculty, administration, and board).

4. An institutional culture that fosters respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives consistent with the institution’s mission.

5. Equitable and consistent treatment of employees and students consistent with appropriate published policies.

6. Honest and open communication regarding compliance with agencies such as accrediting, licensing, and governing bodies.

7. Fulfillment of all applicable standards, policies, and requirements of the COA.

8. Integrity in financial matters and in compliance with applicable legal and governmental regulations.

Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 4
AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

The institution is legally constituted as a nonprofit organization or is a nonprofit subsidiary of a parent organization, authorized by its state or province to operate as an educational institution and grant all degrees and/or offer credentials. The institution has its own governing board with legal and fiduciary responsibility to exercise appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies, resource development, and ongoing operations.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. Enabling documents that establish the institution as a legal entity in its state or province; protect its mission/purpose, tenets of faith, and control; and provide a basis for governance and administration. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, it must have its own enabling documents.

2. Evidence that the institution is authorized to award the credentials that it offers in all of the jurisdictions in which it operates.

3. A governing board that has the necessary authority and exercises legal power for the operation of the institution. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution must have its own governing board, including representatives from a broader pool than the sponsoring organization alone, and autonomy over institutional decisions.

4. Board membership that excludes all employees except the chief executive officer.

5. A governing board with officers that do not include the chief executive officer.

6. A governing board that assists in generating resources needed to sustain and improve the institution.

7. A conflict of interest policy for board members that addresses issues such as financial interests, contracts, employment, family, or other personal interests in the institution.

8. A governing board appropriate in size to operate efficiently and sufficiently diverse in ethnicity, gender (where theologically appropriate), and professional competencies to serve the constituency effectively.


10. A process for effective recruitment, orientation, and development of board members to ensure stability and new membership.

11. A process for providing updates for board members on issues relative to institutional mission, finances, and programs.

12. Board policies and practices that clearly distinguish board and staff roles and that define the authority of the board and its limitations.

Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 5
ADMINISTRATION

The institution has a team of administrators that brings together its various resources and allocates them to accomplish institutional goals.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. A chief executive officer who has the capacity, is sufficiently engaged with the institution, and has the professional qualifications to lead the institution toward the accomplishment of its mission.

2. A chief executive officer appointed by, reporting to, and evaluated on a regular basis by the board.

3. A clearly documented organizational structure appropriate to the size and scope of the institution that encompasses all units and roles.

4. Administrative leaders with education, experiences, and competencies appropriate to the discharge of their duties and to the level of education offered.

5. Ongoing assessment and enhancement of the performance of administrators.

6. Established written policies and procedures to promote effective operations.

7. Complete, accurate, and securely maintained administrative records.

8. Effective communication and collaboration with appropriate stakeholders.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 6
INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

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

6a. HUMAN RESOURCES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. An adequate number of qualified personnel to provide basic services to students, faculty, and administration.
2. Written policies and procedures for hiring, evaluating, promoting, and dismissing personnel based on principles of fairness and respect for individual rights.
3. Demonstrated commitment to provide adequate resources for employee welfare including professional development.
4. Policies and practices that support employee diversity appropriate to the institution’s theological and cultural context.
5. An organizational climate that encourages job satisfaction, collegiality, and respect among personnel.
6. Published and accessible descriptions of organizational structures, job responsibilities, and employee policies.
7. Appropriate provisions for the protection of personnel from threat of harm or loss, including emergency and crisis response measures.

6b. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. Evidence of financial stability documented by independent, opinioned audits, prepared by a licensed accounting professional, approved by the board, and made available to the public.
2. A budgeting process that serves as an effective instrument of financial oversight and planning.
3. The cultivation of adequate revenue streams sufficient to realize institutional goals.
4. Risk management policies and procedures sufficient to safeguard assets and promote effective stewardship of resources.
5. Appropriate board oversight of financial management to meet public accountability obligations.
6. Sufficient financial reserves to enable effective response to unforeseen financial circumstances and enrollment fluctuations.
7. Adequate internal controls to safeguard assets and protect personnel from accusations of wrongdoing.
8. Evidence that institutional planning informs the budgeting process.

6c. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .
1. Evidence that facilities, equipment, and supplies are adequate to support institutional mission, to achieve educational goals, and to ensure continuity of offerings.
2. Sufficient personnel and procedures to maintain physical resources adequately.
3. Evidence that physical resource needs are identified and addressed in the planning process.
4. Facilities and services compliant with applicable health, safety, and disability access codes.
5. Appropriate provisions for the protection of physical resources from threat of harm or loss, including crisis response measures.

6d. TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .
1. Appropriate technology to support the institution’s educational and operational effectiveness.
2. Systematic allocation of resources to maintain current and support future technological capacity.
3. Ongoing training and support for technology personnel and users, including staff and students.
4. Clearly stated policies and procedures regarding technological resources, services, and security, including compliance with privacy regulations.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Semi-Autonomous Institutions]
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 7
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The institution has developed and implemented an enrollment management plan that is consistent with its mission and addresses issues of recruitment, admissions, student financial services and retention.

7a. RECRUITMENT

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .
1. Recruitment strategies that target students whose spiritual commitment, goals and interests are consistent with the institutional mission.
2. Accurate and sufficient recruitment information to enable prospective students to make informed decisions.
3. The allocation of resources and authority to support effective recruitment efforts.
4. Student recruitment policies and practices that encourage ethnic and gender diversity appropriate to the institution’s theological and cultural context.


7b. ADMISSIONS

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .
1. Admissions requirements and procedures that are clearly communicated to prospective students, applied consistently in the admissions process, and appropriate to the level of education.
2. Evaluation procedures that reasonably ensure admitted students have attained the requisite educational level and possess the ability to achieve their educational goals successfully.
3. 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.
4. Systematic procedures for identifying applicants who are not adequately prepared for their desired level of study.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit; Policy on Validating Credits Earned at Unaccredited Institutions]
7c. STUDENT FINANCIAL SERVICES

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. Accurate financial aid information in regard to scholarships, grants, loans and refunds that is published and made available to prospective and enrolled students.
2. Evidence that financial aid practices meet regulatory and reporting requirements.
3. Financial counseling services provided to help students make decisions regarding alternatives for financing their education and to inform students who receive financial assistance of any repayment obligations.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV]

7d. RETENTION

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. Adequate resources and services to address the needs of at-risk students and improve student retention.
2. An assessment process that measures and improves student retention and completion.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 8
STUDENT SERVICES

The institution 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 institution 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. The organization and delivery of student services that are appropriately aligned with the institution’s mission and culture, including services that meet the needs of students regardless of location or instructional delivery system.

3. Services that address diverse student needs, abilities, and cultures.

4. Appropriately qualified personnel who supervise and provide student services and programs.

5. Leadership development facilitated by curricular and/or co-curricular programs that are integrated with the educational objectives.

6. A regular system of assessing levels of student satisfaction and of acting to address issues identified in the assessment process.

7. Opportunities for students to provide input in institutional decision-making.

8. Published procedures for and records of addressing formal student complaints and grievances.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 9
FACULTY

The institution maintains a faculty committed to its mission and qualified academically and spiritually to facilitate student learning within their disciplines and to contribute to the development of a biblical worldview. The institution 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 institution 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 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. A faculty handbook that delineates appropriate policies and procedures, including published criteria for the recruitment, appointment, teaching load, promotion, grievance processes, termination of faculty, and the safeguarding of intellectual property rights based on principles of fairness and regard for the rights of individuals.
7. Systems for evaluating and improving the instructional effectiveness of all faculty.
8. Evidence of faculty contribution to student learning, scholarship, institutional development, ministry, and community service.
9. Support for the professional advancement and development of core and adjunct faculty, as appropriate to the institutional mission.
10. A published statement of academic freedom and adherence to its principles within the context of the institutional mission.
11. A faculty that is representative of the diversity of the constituency and consistent with institutional theological distinctives.
9b. FACULTY DECISION MAKING

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A core faculty of sufficient size and expertise, committed to the fulfillment of the institutional mission, and responsible for the quality of its academic functions.
2. An academic structure organized in departments, divisions, or alternate approaches appropriate to the size and complexity of the institution and the level of education offered.
3. A process of faculty appointment that involves related academic and administrative personnel.
4. A clear and publicized statement of faculty-adopted requirements for graduation that is consistently applied to the certification of graduates.
5. A faculty that is involved in academic-related decision-making processes especially related to admissions criteria, curriculum, and student development.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 10
LEARNING RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The institution ensures the availability of and access to learning resources and services of appropriate form, range, depth, and currency to support the curriculum regardless of location, instructional modality, or language of instruction.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution is characterized by . . .

1. A written learning resource purpose statement and objectives, consistent with the institutional mission and educational outcomes.
2. Appropriate written policies and procedures relating to the management of learning resources and services for all instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
3. Sufficient funding, staff, technology infrastructure, virtual or physical presence and policies to procure and maintain appropriate learning resources and services for all instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
4. The availability of reference, technical, and circulation services and other means of support to meet the research and information needs of students and faculty for all instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
5. Promotion in all instructional modalities and languages of instruction to enhance student and faculty awareness of available resources and services.
6. Documentation of participation in library and resource sharing networks or other agreements that involve the use of learning resources and services, if applicable.
7. Joint participation of library personnel and faculty in curriculum planning, the analysis of resource and service adequacy, the selection of learning resources, and review of learning resource policies for all instructional modalities.
8. Policies, procedures, technology infrastructure, and virtual or physical presence that ensure access to and security of learning resources and the privacy of patron data.
9. A collection of appropriate learning resources based on the curriculum, course offerings, instructional modalities, usage demands, and languages of instruction.
10. Effective leadership by a credentialed director with faculty status.
11. Effective collaboration between the library and information technology personnel for the development, maintenance, and enhancement of the technology infrastructure to provide access to all learning resources and services.
12. Ongoing outcomes assessment of learning resources and services and their utilization by the learning community for the purpose of improvement.
13. Curricular requirements, instruction, and reference services supporting development of information literacy competencies for all instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
Institutional Accreditation Standards

STANDARD 11
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The institution’s academic programs are appropriate to the achievement of its mission and to the level of educational programs offered, with all programs supporting development of a biblical worldview and some programs orientated specifically to full-time vocational ministry.

11a. CURRICULUM

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited institution 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 lifelong 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 them.

3. Evidence that the integration of curricular components supports development of a biblical worldview.

4. A curriculum 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, the undergraduate programs of an accredited institution are 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 on Adult Degree Completion Programs; Policy on the Conferral 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, the graduate programs of an accredited institution are 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 practice.

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 prerequisite 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 institution offering undergraduate curricula (and graduate curricula that feature 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 ministry formation program coordinated by a director normally with faculty status and implemented under the supervision of faculty.

5. Evidence that the program is adequately staffed and financially supported.

6. A system of ongoing program review and assessment of outcomes that results in program improvement.

7. 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 institution 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.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Instructional Modalities; Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus; Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses, Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Distance Education and Correspondence Studies]
Programmatic Accreditation Standards
Revised February 2023

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 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.

* * *
Programmatic Accreditation Standards

Standard 1
PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The program has specified objectives that reflect the institutional mission and lead to the development of students for church-related ministries.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .
1. Clearly articulated student learning objectives for each educational program that support fulfillment of the institutional mission statement.
2. Objectives that are easily located on the institution’s website and in its catalog(s).

Standard 2
ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

The program demonstrates that it is fulfilling and can continue to fulfill its objectives and improve effectiveness through an ongoing system of assessment and planning.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .
1. A written, comprehensive assessment plan that describes what data (qualitative and/or quantitative) the program gathers to demonstrate fulfillment of student learning objectives and how and when data are gathered in an ongoing and structured way.
2. Clearly defined and measurable student learning outcomes that support mission fulfillment accompanied by metrics or other means that effectively assess whether or not the program is achieving its stated objectives.
3. Student learning outcomes appropriate to the higher education credential to be awarded (certificate, associate, baccalaureate, master’s, and/or doctoral study).
4. Use of multiple means to validate student learning outcomes.
5. Meaningful analysis of assessment data and use of results by appropriate constituencies in a clearly documented, ongoing planning process for the purpose of improvement in teaching, learning, and program effectiveness.
6. A written, comprehensive program improvement plan based on assessment results and aligned with realistic resource projections.
7. The ongoing provision of reliable information to the public regarding program performance and student achievement, including graduation rates and employment rates for graduates of professional programs. Such outcomes data must be available through an easily identified link on the institution’s website and disaggregated by program.
Standard 3
INTEGRITY

The program demonstrates 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 6), websites and other media/online 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. A program culture that fosters respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives, consistent with the institution’s mission.

3. Equitable and consistent treatment of employees and students consistent with appropriate published policies.

4. Honest and open communication regarding compliance with agencies such as accrediting, licensing, and governing bodies.

5. Fulfillment of all applicable standards, policies, and requirements of the ABHE Commission on Accreditation.

6. Integrity in all financial matters and in compliance with applicable legal and governmental regulations.


STANDARD 4
AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

Standard 4 not applicable to programmatic accreditation review.

Standard 5
ADMINISTRATION

The program has a team of administrators that brings together its various resources and allocates them to accomplish objectives.

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.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit; Policy on Validating Credits Earned at Unaccredited Institutions; Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

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 core and adjunct faculty, as appropriate to the institutional mission.
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
LEARNING RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The program ensures the availability of and access to learning resources and services of appropriate form, range, depth, and currency to support the curriculum, regardless of location, instructional modality, or language of instruction.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
Relative to this standard, an accredited program is characterized by . . .
1. Sufficient funding, staff, technology infrastructure, virtual or physical presence, and policies to procure and maintain appropriate learning resources and services for all program instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
2. The availability of reference, technical, circulation services, and other means of support to meet the research and information needs of students and faculty for all program instructional modalities and languages of instruction.
3. Joint participation of library personnel and faculty in curriculum planning, the analysis of resource and service adequacy, the selection of learning resources, and review of learning resources policies for all instructional modalities.
4. Ongoing outcomes assessment of learning resources and services and their utilization by the learning community for the purpose of improvement.

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 lifelong 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.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Instructional Modalities; Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus; Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses, Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Distance Education and Correspondence Studies]
Institutions or programs have one year to comply with newly adopted policies.
Policies Relating to Commission on Accreditation Standards
Policy on Biblical and Theological Studies
(Applicable to Undergraduate Only)

Biblical and theological study is at the heart of the educational experience in an ABHE-accredited institution, and ABHE’s common commitment is to extensive and serious study of the Word of God as fundamental to a meaningful biblical higher education credential. An understanding of the Word of God and its application in living context is essential to a biblical higher education, regardless of the professional discipline for which a student prepares. While significant content in biblical/theological studies is unequivocal, the method of engagement, delivery, and evaluation of that content are subject to the unique contexts of individual institutions and programs, and ABHE intentionally seeks to maintain flexibility in how the Bible/theology core is fulfilled.

Institutions are at liberty to engage biblical/theological study through (1) discrete courses in Bible or theology, (2) interdisciplinary courses including Bible/theology content, (3) competency-based outcomes demonstrating biblical/theological knowledge, or (4) other means of demonstrating a substantial acquisition of Bible/theology knowledge at the level required for the designated credential as specified in Standard 11a. Note that Standard 11a specifies minimum expectations for all programs; specific programs and institutional outcomes may necessitate additional engagement in biblical-theological study.

Institutions that elect to fulfill some or all of the Bible/theology requirement through means other than courses clearly identified by course description and content as biblical or theological must demonstrate that the requirements have been fulfilled through equivalent coursework and/or learning experiences. It is the responsibility of the institution to document equivalence to the satisfaction of the Commission on Accreditation (COA).

Definitions:

Biblical Studies Course

A biblical studies course is one that incorporates major engagement with the biblical text. For such a course, the syllabus will clearly indicate that the major thrust of the course is direct study of the Bible. The Bible will be identified as the main text; reading assignments will be heavily and primarily focused on the Bible; assigned papers will require significant biblical study, interpretation, and/or application; tests will be designed primarily to determine a student’s facility for interpreting and applying biblical principles; and the final grade awarded will reflect the degree to which a student demonstrates mastery in interpreting and applying Scripture. Hence, course work such as archaeology, ethics, geography, and hermeneutics would be classified as Bible only if it satisfies the above requirements.
Theological Studies Course

The syllabus for such a course will clearly indicate that the major thrust of the course is theological. Course work may include theological studies emanating from an historical, systematic, or biblical perspective. Hence, courses such as ethics, contemporary theology, denominational theology, pastoral theology, and philosophy would be classified as theological. Courses that summarize Christian doctrine with a view to relating it convincingly to the present, or historical theology, i.e., an examination of the historical development of various doctrines, would also be classified as theological.

Interdisciplinary Bible-Related Course

An interdisciplinary Bible-related course applies the Bible’s teaching to various practical areas of study. The syllabus for a given course will clearly indicate that the course content is built on related biblical and theological truth which is then applied to the subject matter, skill, principles, or practice of a professional discipline. Hence, courses such as Business Principles and Practices, Ethics, Teaching Bible, Educational Philosophy, Communication Theory, The Bible as Literature, Principles of Leadership, Human Resource Management, and Economic Theory may be counted as Interdisciplinary Bible-related courses if a major focus of the course is clearly the integration of the Bible with the discipline.

Alternative Bible-Theology Requirement

Completion of 50% or more of the Bible-theology requirement through means other than Biblical Studies courses and/or Theological Studies courses as defined above constitutes an alternative Bible-theology requirement. Institutions must file a substantive change request with the COA and secure COA approval before implementing an alternative Bible-theology requirement. The institution will address the following questions in its substantive change proposal to the COA:

- Does the proposed alternative include direct study of the Bible? If so, how is this quantified or demonstrated to be substantial engagement in biblical study equivalent to the credit hours specified?
- Does the proposed alternative provide the student with skills in biblical interpretation and application?
- How does the student demonstrate mastery in interpreting and applying Scripture in the proposed alternative?
- How will the institution verify that student achievement of stated outcomes in biblical and theological studies is achieved?
- How do the credit hours or credit hour equivalents in Bible-theology in the proposed alternative compare to the credit hour requirements in Standard 11a?

[Applicable Standards: 11a] [Applicable Policy: Policy on Substantive Change]

Policy on Independent Accreditation Status

Introduction

In order to make education more accessible, ABHE-member institutions have increasingly taken steps to establish educational opportunities at a distance from the parent campus. This is accomplished through use of various educational modalities and through the establishment of off-campus instructional sites. The ABHE Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus recognizes three types of off-campus instructional sites: 1) extension classes; 2) additional locations; and 3) branch campuses. The policy defines the latter two in a manner suggesting a level of permanence that enables a student to complete a major portion of an academic program. Indeed, it may be possible for a student to earn a credential at the site.

In the course of time, it is possible that the stature of an additional location or branch campus could grow to the point that the administration of the parent institution and/or the key stakeholders in the local site would wish to establish the site as a free-standing educational institution and to pursue accreditation as an independent entity. Should such a situation arise, a spirit of Christian unity, professional collegiality, and integrity should guide all stakeholders. Specifically, the Commission on Accreditation (COA) expects that the following procedures will be followed:

- The “new” independent entity must be a COA-approved additional location or branch campus.
- Personnel representing the “new” independent entity must provide written documentation demonstrating that the parent institution either endorses the establishment of a free-standing entity or, at a minimum, that its governing board is fully apprised regarding the plans of those who seek to establish the new institution.
- Where the new institution is being formed upon the initiative or blessing of the parent campus, the COA may recognize the parent institution’s postsecondary courses and degree programs conducted at the site towards satisfaction of the ABHE Conditions of Eligibility. The new institution must document its compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility and otherwise exhibit the characteristics of an independent entity.
  1. The emerging institution must establish a business operation separate or distinguishable from that of the parent campus that will sustain the institution once it becomes independent.
  2. The emerging institution will develop its own mission statement and institutional goals, conduct its own assessment of both student learning and institutional effectiveness, form its own governing board (although the authority of this governing board may be muted until it is independent of the parent campus), develop its own administration, submit its own financial audit, develop its own enrollment practices, deliver its own student services, provide its own faculty, and provide its own learning resources. These must
be compatible with that of the parent institution for as long as the emerging institution remains an additional location of the parent institution.

3. Curriculum, faculty selection, and academic decisions will remain subject to the oversight of the parent campus until the emerging institution declares independence from the parent campus and is no longer an additional location of the parent institution.

4. The emerging institution will go through a normal process of evaluation and review, but official status with the COA (applicant, candidate or accredited) will remain under the accreditation status of the parent institution until the emerging institution is recognized as independent. The parent institution’s accreditation status and oversight no longer applies to the emerging institution once independence has been declared.

- In instances where the new institution is being formed over the objection of the parent campus, the new entity will be required to satisfy ABHE’s eligibility requirements without reference to its history with the parent institution. This requires that the new entity assume responsibility for securing its resources independent of the parent:
  1. Curriculum – it will need to establish its own curriculum or provide evidence that the parent has given it permission to use the curricula historically taught.
  2. Governance – it will need to establish a separate corporate identity, nonprofit status, enabling documents, and board of control. (This principle does not preclude it from establishing a separate identity with another organization, i.e., a sponsoring church.)
  3. Faculty – it will need to employ its own faculty. Individuals will, of course, be free to retain their relationship with the parent institution or seek employment with the new entity.
  4. Students – it will need to recruit its own student body. Existing students who were enrolled in the programs of the parent entity at the time of the separation should be encouraged to complete their studies with the parent entity. (They will normally want to do this since it will take time for the new entity to achieve accreditation.)
  5. Learning Resources – it will need to establish its own learning resources and/or enter into a contract with the parent institution regarding the use of its resources.
  6. Campus Facilities – it will need to work out an acceptable arrangement with the parent entity over the use of the campus facilities. The range of potential arrangements will vary widely depending on the legal obligations in place at the time of independence.

- Unless the parent institution is a participant in the development of the instructional site as an independent entity, the new institution will be required to satisfy Condition of Eligibility 14, Program Completion, without reference to its prior connection with the parent institution.

Adopted February 2011; Revised June 2017, June 2018, February 2023
Policy on Instructional Modalities

The ABHE Accreditation Standards and Essential Elements apply to all modes of delivery, including distance, correspondence, and competency-based education. Institutions are responsible for the quality of programs and instruction regardless of instructional modality, and for ensuring that all educational programs and courses/instruction offered include access to student services and resources that support student success and development. Institutions are expected to refer to current best practices for delivering instruction and student services for the chosen modality. All courses/instruction for credit or leading to a credential (degree, certificate) must be under the direct control of the institution’s administration, regardless of instructional modality. The initiation of courses/instruction or programs in a new instructional modality requires compliance with the Policy on Substantive Change.

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation expects institutions not only to meet the Standards and Essential Elements for all instructional modalities, but also to comply with all related COA policies and with regulations in all jurisdictions in which it operates. Outlined below are definitions of instructional modalities and a summary of COA standards and policy statements related to distance, correspondence, and competency-based modalities.

Definitions of Instructional Modalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality (synonyms)</th>
<th>Proportion of Instruction* Delivered in a Face-to-Face** Setting</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Requires Substantive Change to do 50% or more of a program?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
<td>51% or more</td>
<td>Course content is delivered in a mandatory face-to-face setting. May use some technologically-mediated educational engagement strategies to enhance the course and/or to replace some face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance Education</td>
<td>0-50%</td>
<td>Characterized by instructor and students being separated by space and/or time; most course activity is done via technologically-mediated educational strategies including but not limited to video conferencing, audio conferencing and learning management systems; courses include substantive and regular faculty-student interaction</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Instructional materials are delivered via mail or electronic means; there are no required face-to-face sessions within the course and no requirements for on-campus activity; interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Modality</td>
<td>Student Choice</td>
<td>Students can choose between two or more modalities for class sessions and/or learning activities depending on the student’s schedule and learning preference.</td>
<td>Institution or Program must be approved for 50% or more of each modality used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-Based Education</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>An outcomes-based system of instruction in which the student’s demonstrated proficiency in specified knowledge or skills is the basis for measuring satisfaction of course, program, or degree requirements, regardless of time spent in class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Instruction = interaction between students and instructors and among students
**Face-to-face = synchronous interaction in the same physical space

These descriptions were informed by the working definitions from the Online Learning Consortium and SACSCOC

**Related Policies for Distance Education**
1. Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Correspondence and Distance Education
2. Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses
3. Policy on Compliance with U.S. Department of Education Regulations

**Related Policies for Correspondence Education**
Correspondence education is not distance education, and correspondence courses are not eligible for Title IV financial aid. Correspondence education is not within ABHE’s scope of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

1. Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Correspondence and Distance Education
Related Policies for Competency-Based Education

1. Policy on Competency-Based Education
2. Policy on Compliance with U.S. Department of Education Regulations

Adopted June 2022
Policy on Canadian Institution Degree Programs
(Applicable to Undergraduate Only)

The following facts and observations need to be considered concerning the length of degree programs in ABHE Canadian institutions.

1. There is a lack of uniformity in Canadian higher education regarding the length and content of degree programs.
2. Several Canadian provinces offer a Grade-12 senior matriculation that is regarded as being equivalent to first-year university studies. This equivalency, however, is no longer fully accepted nationally and internationally as it was in the past. Senior matriculation programs have undergone change over the years and have become more similar to high school programs being offered in other provinces and in the U.S.
3. There is a trend in Canadian universities towards the four-year bachelor’s degree; however, universities in several provinces offer three-year bachelor’s degrees.
4. It is desirable to see greater standardization in the length of degree programs offered in ABHE institutions in Canada but not at the expense of enforced departure from accepted provincial educational patterns.

Policy

Since higher education is under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, and there is no federal standardizing agency, considerable diversity exists regarding the length and content of degree programs. ABHE policy on the length of degree programs in Canadian institutions should both respect this diversity and at the same time encourage movement toward standardization. Therefore,

1. ABHE institutions in Canada are encouraged to move toward offering the standard four-year bachelor’s degree, particularly for vocational programs.
2. As long as provincial universities are offering three-year bachelor’s degrees, ABHE institutions located in these provinces will not be prevented from also offering three-year degree programs. Canadian three-year, pre-seminary baccalaureate programs must require a minimum of 24 semester hours (36 quarter hours) of biblical/theological studies.
3. All ABHE programs must have a sound and acceptable philosophy of general studies and should make sure that adequate general studies course work is offered and taught at the level of higher education so as to fulfill all the objectives of its programs. The length of degree programs must never be used by an ABHE applicant, candidate, or accredited institution as an excuse for inadequate treatment of the general studies component.
4. Tolerance and understanding should be shown by ABHE advisors, evaluators, and Commissioners towards Canadian institutions that are working through this transitional stage, especially when these institutions are working within the assumptions of their
provincial authorities with regard to the equivalency of Grade-12 senior matriculation to first-year university. Since ABHE institutions operate in Canada, it is legitimate that they should be allowed to develop according to, and be evaluated by, prevailing standards in Canadian higher education in conjunction with the regular standards of the ABHE that are based upon American norms in higher education.

5. In Canadian higher education, the Bachelor of Theology degree is frequently associated with the British tradition rather than the American. In British and Canadian universities, the B.Th. is a standard undergraduate degree in divinity or theology and requires no more than four years of study beyond high school. Canadian ABHE institutions, therefore, should not be prevented from offering four-year B.Th. programs.

[Applicable Standards: 11a]

Revised October 1983, February 1994
Policy on Adult Degree Completion Programs
(Applicable to Undergraduate Only)

The Commission on Accreditation (COA) has witnessed implementation of an increasing number of adult degree completion programs offered by member institutions. The growth of such programs has doubtless been stimulated by the need for lifelong learning opportunities, rapid changes in the workplace and ministry vocations, and the need for additional flexibility in degree program opportunities provided by member institutions. While acknowledging the need for appropriate educational and degree programs designed to respond to the needs of adult learners with incomplete or inadequate higher educational credentials, proliferation of such programs raises numerous potential quality assurance concerns.

The COA’s posture toward educational innovation is well documented in its Policy on the Spirit of Accreditation. The COA does not desire to inhibit institutions endeavoring to address constituent needs for Bible-centered postsecondary education and adult ministry formation for adult learners through non-conventional means. At the same time, the COA endeavors to assist institutions contemplating and designing such educational programs in the careful consideration of adequate measures for educational quality assurance.

Initial implementation or addition of adult degree completion programs constitutes a substantive change, as indicated in the COA’s Policy on Substantive Change. Adult degree completion programs must also fully meet all applicable Standards for Accreditation. In addition to general guidelines prescribed for submission of substantive change proposals, substantive change proposals for adult degree completion programs must respond (including submission of appropriate documentation) to each of the following specific requirements:

1. The educational objectives, content, and methodologies of the degree completion program must be consonant with the institution’s mission statement and educational goals.

2. Spiritual and academic admissions requirements must be consistent with the institutional mission and with admission policies and practices for resident degree programs; deviations (in policy or practice) from resident program admission standards must have approval of the faculty, administration, and governing board, and rationale for such deviation must be documented.

3. The degree completion program must maintain standards commensurate with the academic rigor, policies, and procedures (i.e., in such matters as academic probation and dismissal, course waivers and substitutions, grading) employed for the institution’s traditional programs.

4. The institution must designate means and procedures by which it will assess the extent to which stated learning and developmental outcomes for the degree completion courses and programs are comparable to those in the institution’s parallel traditional courses and programs.
5. The institution must follow practices consistent with its traditional resident programs for the screening, employment, orientation, training, and evaluation as appropriate for full- and part-time faculty members. Substantive change proposals for degree completion programs should include faculty rosters documenting academic and experiential credentials and teaching assignments for faculty employed to teach in the program.

6. Where extensive reliance upon part-time faculty to teach adult degree completion program courses is contemplated, either temporarily or long term, the program must describe means by which it will assess student satisfaction with faculty accessibility and adequacy of faculty/student interaction.

7. In cases where resident faculty are relied upon to teach courses in the degree completion program, whether the institution considers such courses part of standard teaching assignments or voluntary overload for additional pay, such assignments must be included in institutional reports of faculty workload.

8. The institution must develop a plan to provide special training in andragogical principles to all instructors within the program.

9. The institution must provide evidence that appropriate support services are accessible to the degree completion student.

10. The institution must provide evidence that appropriate learning resources are accessible to the degree completion student, that courses require appropriate use of learning resources, and that students actually use appropriate learning resources in completing course requirements.

11. Students in the degree completion program need to meet the minimum number of Bible credits (Standard 11a, undergraduate programs) set forth by ABHE standards.

12. The program must delineate ways in which adult degree completion students will fulfill ministry formation requirements.

13. The amount of classroom contact in the degree completion program should equal approximately 50% or more of a traditional program. Adult education factors and rationale upon which the degree completion program’s accelerated calendar and curricular scheme are based should be clearly understood and enunciated (e.g., adult students, cohort system, collaborative learning, consolidated block of class time, consolidated block of homework time, one course taken at a time, etc.) in all published materials relating to the program.

14. The program must specify the total number of credit hours (ordinarily no more than 50%) which may be earned through degree completion program course work.
15. The institution must specify the total number of credit hours (ordinarily no more than 30%), which may be earned through non-instructional means (e.g., credit-by-examination and credit for prior learning).

16. Whenever appropriate, awarding of credit for prior learning (CPL) [credit for demonstrated competence (CDC)] will follow the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) standards or be based upon recommendations of the College Credit Recommendation Service (formerly American Council on Education/Program on Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction, under the auspices of the State University of New York). No more than 30 semester hours of credit for prior learning will be awarded toward a degree.

17. If an institution approves certain workshops, seminars, or programs for a standard CPL award, the rationale in each case (based upon such factors as objectives, contact hours, instructor qualifications, student requirements, quality of materials, assessment of learning, etc.) for such standard awards will be documented in a policy and procedure manual.

18. A variety of periodic and systematic outcomes assessment procedures should be established to assess the quality and integrity of the degree completion program and its comparability to the institution’s traditional degree programs.

19. Where off-campus locations are involved, the institution must demonstrate appropriate special arrangements provided for student access to faculty members, student services (e.g., academic advising, guidance and counseling, academic services, financial aid), and learning resources (see ABHE Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus).

20. When possible, institutions initiating adult degree completion programs will receive a special evaluation visit within the first six months of operation. In cases where reaffirmation visits will take place within one year, such visits may be waived, but an additional member of the reaffirmation committee will be assigned to review the degree completion program(s).

21. The institution must demonstrate that its pricing policies are both ethically and financially appropriate to the costs incurred and the services rendered.

[Applicable Standards: 11a]

Adopted February 1998; Revised June 2014
Policy on General Studies
(Applicable to Undergraduate Only)

The general studies core is the breadth component of an undergraduate degree program. Majors and professional studies are the depth components.

General Studies in Biblical Higher Education

General studies encompass several subject areas, convey an advanced body of knowledge, and provide for the development of a high level of analytical and communicative skills that are expected of program graduates. General studies focus upon key concepts and philosophical issues in the various disciplines. Presuppositions and worldviews are examined in light of biblical principles. The integrating of biblical and general studies forms the basis for development of a biblical worldview and provides a frame of reference for engaging those to whom graduates are called to minister.

Coursework Qualifying as General Studies

For general studies to serve as the breadth component of a degree program, it is essential that the coursework include a distribution of courses from several disciplines. One or more courses from each of the following disciplines must be included in the general studies core:

- Communication (e.g., composition, public speaking, writing courses)
- Humanities/Fine Arts (e.g., modern and classical languages, history, literature, linguistics, philosophy, archaeology, art, music, graphics)
- Natural Science/Mathematics (e.g., physical science, biology/life science, physics, chemistry, mathematics, statistics)
- Social/Behavioral Sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science)

Courses listed are illustrative and not limiting in options for consideration. Courses from other disciplines may be included in the general studies core.

If the program includes a non-Bible/theology major, non-introductory courses in the discipline of the major do not qualify as general studies. Also, courses that qualify as biblical/theological studies, although having general education value in other contexts, do not qualify as general studies within the context of biblical higher education.

A course with three prerequisites does not qualify as general studies. Such a course is too specialized to be classified as “general” and should rather be incorporated into a major or minor.

[Applicable Standards: 11a]

Adopted October 1983; Revised October 1990, February 2004, February 2017
Policy on Outcomes

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) places high emphasis on achievement of outcomes related to institution or program mission. This policy offers guidance to institutions concerning outcomes, COA review considerations, and communication of outcomes to the public in a meaningful and consumer-friendly fashion.

Outcomes must:
- Support mission fulfillment
- Be measurable
- Be accompanied by metrics or other means to effectively assess fulfillment
- Use multiple means of assessment for validation
- Be easily accessible on the institutional website

Mission Fulfillment

ABHE expects outcomes to demonstrate mission fulfillment. Objectives (intended results) may reflect elements of the mission rather than the mission as a whole, in which case, multiple objectives would need to be developed and reflected in outcomes (demonstrated results). Student learning outcomes must factor significantly into fulfillment of institutional and program objectives and be appropriate for biblical higher education as well as the level of credential offered for each program (undergraduate certificate, associate’s degree, baccalaureate degree, graduate certificate, master’s degree, or doctoral degree).

Where an institution offers multiple academic programs, program objectives and outcomes must be articulated for each program, and program objectives must align with the mission. Program outcomes may be used as an indicator of fulfillment of program objectives, institutional objectives, and/or institutional mission. Evaluators will consider the appropriateness of objectives/outcomes in relation to mission fulfillment based on face validity.

Measurability

Outcomes need to be measurable. ABHE Standard 2 allows for quantitative and qualitative measures, as well as other approaches the institution may develop that effectively assess outcomes. For example, the percentage of students achieving a benchmark test score on a standardized examination (quantitative), analysis of student work for outcomes-related characteristics (qualitative), and testimonials from employers/ministry supervisors as evidence of outcome achievement would all be acceptable means of measurement.

The key to effective measurement, however, is to ensure that the results accurately reflect the population described. Reporting of outcomes should reflect observations concerning all students in the program (aggregate results), not just outstanding achievement by some of the students in the program. If sampling techniques are employed, the institution needs to be careful that sampling results yield conclusions that accurately reflect the total student population.
Effective Assessment of Fulfillment

Outcomes should reflect the extent to which students and the institution are achieving stated objectives, and as such, there need to be defined indicators of success (e.g., benchmarks or targets). Institutions are expected to identify reasonable indicators of success that serve as assessment goals and confirmation to the public that the institution is fulfilling its objectives. Where an institution falls short in meeting these indicators of success, the institution is expected to develop and implement an Institutional Improvement Plan that articulates both the action steps and resources needed for improvement to achieve objectives. A reasonable majority of students must be achieving the outcome for claims that the institution fulfills the outcome (e.g., 75% of students).

Multiple Means of Validation

Institutions should not rely on a single source or assessment tool as the basis for determining fulfillment of objectives. Assessment practices should include a variety of inputs. Typical resources include achievement test results, professional licensure examinations or ordination results, employer opinion surveys, field observation reports, validations by faculty, alumni and student surveys, satisfactory completion of specific assignments, etc. Preference should be given to indicators that directly assess demonstration of knowledge or skills identified in the objective, rather than indirect indicators (such as student opinion surveys). Course grades should not be used as the primary means for demonstrating achievement of student learning objectives.

Easy Public Access to Outcomes Data

ABHE Standard 1 requires that the mission statement, institutional goals, and student learning objectives be easily accessible on the website and in the institution’s academic catalog(s). Institutional performance and student achievement outcomes must be available on the website through an easily identified link on the institution’s homepage. Anyone should be able to easily identify the link on the homepage that will yield outcomes data. A reasonable link name is one that prospective students, parents, donors, accreditors and regulators, and the public would readily identify as the appropriate place to click to find outcomes data. Obscure link names should be avoided. Some common names used by institutions for such homepage links include the following:

- About
- Student Achievement
- Outcomes Data
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Institutional Research
- Consumer Information

The homepage link should also lead directly to outcomes data or a landing page which itemizes outcomes data available. Generally, two or three clicks from the homepage (or similar ease of
access) to find outcomes data is reasonable. If clicking through several additional pages is needed to locate outcomes data, accessibility is deficient.

**Meaningful Consumer Information**

Outcomes data must be stated in a meaningful fashion that the general public would understand. Percentage data should be accompanied by the number of students in the cohort or population that the percentage reflects. Where the number of responses is cited, the total in the population should also be cited (e.g., 57 out of 100 May 2015 graduates were employed in positions related to their major 3 years after graduation). Reporting should also reference what year(s) the data reflects (e.g., 87% of the 247 students who graduated in 2017 through 2020 would ‘recommend’ or ‘strongly recommend’ the college to their friends).

Since ABHE institutions equip graduates for a life of Christian service, not just careers in ministry or other professions, institutions are at liberty to consider volunteer service as fulfillment of mission goals and employment/placement statistics. If volunteer service is included in such statistics, this should be clearly identified in the outcome statement.

For many ABHE institutions, a year or two of biblical higher education is the goal for students who would otherwise receive a completely secular higher education. Students who transfer to programs at other institutions of higher education rather than complete a program at the ABHE institution may be included as “transfer-out” students and reported as a combined “graduation/transfer-out rate.” Data reported this way should be clear in related outcome statements.

Institutions and evaluators are encouraged to use the following rubric in evaluating outcome statements and results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsatisfactory Achievement of Expectation</th>
<th>Minimal Achievement of Expectation</th>
<th>Substantial Achievement of Expectation</th>
<th>Exemplary Achievement of Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No institutional objective is clearly defined.</td>
<td>Some institutional objectives are clearly defined.</td>
<td>Most institutional objectives are clearly defined.</td>
<td>All institutional objectives are clearly defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No institutional objective supports mission fulfillment.</td>
<td>Some institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.</td>
<td>Most institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.</td>
<td>All institutional objectives support mission fulfillment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No program student learning objective is clearly defined.</td>
<td>Some program student learning objectives are clearly defined.</td>
<td>Most program student learning objectives are clearly defined.</td>
<td>All program student learning objectives are clearly defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No objective is stated in measurable terms.</td>
<td>Some objectives are stated in measurable terms.</td>
<td>Most objectives are stated in measurable terms.</td>
<td>All objectives are stated in measurable terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.</td>
<td>Some student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.</td>
<td>Most student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.</td>
<td>All student learning is effectively measured by assessment methods and metrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.</td>
<td>Some indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.</td>
<td>Most indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.</td>
<td>All indicators of achievement (benchmarks) are defined for outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.</td>
<td>Some outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.</td>
<td>Most outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.</td>
<td>All outcome benchmarks are rigorous enough to verify objectives are met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No outcomes evidence objectives are being met.</td>
<td>Some outcomes evidence objectives are being met.</td>
<td>Most outcomes evidence objectives are being met.</td>
<td>All outcomes evidence objectives are being met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years do not meet ABHE expectations.*</td>
<td>Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years marginally or inconsistently meet ABHE expectations.*</td>
<td>Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a small margin.*</td>
<td>Graduation/transfer-out rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a large margin.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention rates over the last 3 years do not meet ABHE expectations.*</td>
<td>Retention rates over the last 3 years marginally or inconsistently meet ABHE expectations.*</td>
<td>Retention rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a small margin.*</td>
<td>Retention rates over the last 3 years consistently exceed ABHE minimum expectations by a large margin.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See the Policy and Procedures for Monitoring Annual Report Data for expectations.

Institutions that fail to achieve their stated objectives and COA-designated student achievement indicator benchmarks on an ongoing basis will be subject to COA review and potential sanction.

Adopted November 2020
Policy on International Education Programs

Educational institutions in the U.S. and Canada are establishing branch campuses abroad and moving entire degree programs overseas. Therefore, guidelines are needed to ensure quality of programs wherever they are offered. The following principles should assist institutions in planning international ventures and evaluation teams in assessing those programs.

These principles are derived from a longer list endorsed by the Executive Directors of the regional institutional accrediting bodies of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation on February 14, 1990, and neither supplant the ABHE Standards for Accreditation nor replace the processes for approving programmatic change.

The Principles

1. The international program is rooted in the institution’s stated mission and purposes.

2. The institution cooperates with the appropriate educational community leadership in the host country.

3. The international program has received all appropriate internal programmatic approvals, including that of the governing board, and all appropriate external approvals where required, including government bodies and accrediting associations. The program is controlled by the institution and its board.

4. The institution documents the accepted legal basis for its operations in the host country.

5. The program specifies the educational needs to be met by the international program.

6. The content of the program is subject to review by the program’s faculty and is taught by faculty with appropriate academic preparation and language proficiencies.

7. While the program, where appropriate, is adapted to the culture of the host country, the standard of student achievement in the international program is equivalent to the standard of student achievement on the institution’s campus.

8. The institution currently uses and assures the continuing use of adequate physical facilities for its international education program, including classrooms, offices, and libraries, and provides access to computer facilities where appropriate.

9. The institution has demonstrated its financial capacity to underwrite the international program without diminishing its financial support of the home campus. Financing of the international program is incorporated into the regular budgeting and auditing process.
10. International students admitted abroad meet admissions requirements similar to those used for international students admitted to the home campus, including appropriate language proficiencies.

11. The institution exercises control over recruitment and admission of students in the international program and all such students are recognized as students of the program.

12. All academic credits earned in the international program are applicable to comparative degree programs at the program.

13. The institution maintains official records of academic credit earned in its international program and the official transcript of record follows the institution’s practices.

14. The institution assures that its international program provides a supportive environment for student development consistent with the culture and mores of the international setting, and students in the international program are fully informed as to services that will or will not be provided.

15. The institution’s primary catalog describes its international program.

16. In instances where contractual relationships are established, the official contract is available in all languages of the contracting parties.

17. Procedures for program termination are available to provide appropriate protection for enrolled students.

[Applicable Standards: 11a]

Adopted February 1998
Policy on Certificate, Diploma, and Two-Year Degree Programs  
(Applicable to Undergraduate Only)

Generally, the purposes of certificate, diploma, and two-year degree programs are to provide the benefits of a biblical higher education to those students (1) who do not elect to complete a four-year degree, (2) who are planning to transfer to another college or university, or (3) who are preparing for an occupation or ministry that does not require a four-year degree. The terms “certificate” and “diploma” are considered synonymous for ABHE purposes. Whether the program is terminal (preparation for immediate entry into a career or profession) or transfer (preparation for further education), the following guidelines apply.

1. One- and two-year certificate/diploma programs and associate degrees must include the equivalent of 12 semester hours (18 quarter hours) of biblical/theological studies that emphasize an examination of those biblical principles that are essential for the development of a biblical worldview.

2. Associate degree programs must include a minimum of 15 semester hours (24 quarter hours) of general studies that emphasize examination of the presuppositions underlying the various disciplines in light of biblical principles. One or more courses must be drawn from each of the following four disciplines: Communication, Humanities/Fine Arts, Natural Science/Mathematics, and Social/Behavioral Sciences.

3. Three-year certificate/diploma programs must include the equivalent of 24 semester hours (36 quarter hours) of biblical/theological studies.

4. Four-year certificate/diploma programs must include the equivalent of 30 semester hours (45 quarter hours) of biblical/theological studies.

5. Students must be afforded the opportunity to actively participate in a program of ministry formation.

6. Students must be challenged to develop a personal philosophy of ministry that emphasizes the application of biblical principles to both the unchanging need of humanity and the changing issues and needs of modern society.

7. Students must be afforded the opportunity to formulate a biblical worldview based upon their biblical and general studies and their involvement in ministry.

8. Students must be challenged to embody the characteristics and spirit of Jesus Christ.

[Applicable standards: 11a]

Adopted October 1979; Revised October 1987, October 1990, June 2018
Policy on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation subscribes to the 2017 Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit as adopted by the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the American Council on Education (ACE). The statement is provided in its entirety below.

Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit

Introduction

These guidelines were developed by the two national associations whose member institutions are directly involved in the transfer¹ and award of postsecondary academic credit, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, along with the American Council on Education (ACE), which makes credit recommendations for learning gained outside of traditional college classrooms.

Students increasingly are pursuing their education in a variety of institutional and extra-institutional settings. Social equity and the intelligent use of resources require that validated learning be appropriately recognized wherever it takes place. Individual institutions must have the autonomy to make the ultimate decision regarding transfer of credit according to their own academic mission and standards. Below are important considerations for institutions to take into account in developing credit transfer policies or accepting credit students seek to apply from another institution or an extra-institutional setting such as workplace courses or military occupations and training.

¹ "Transfer" as used here refers to the movement of students from one college, university or other education provider to another and to the process by which credits representing educational experiences, courses, degrees or credentials that are awarded by an education provider are accepted or not accepted by a receiving institution.

General Principles

This statement is directed to colleges and universities and others concerned with the transfer and award of academic credit between higher education institutions or recommended credit based on learning that occurs outside of the college classroom. An essential principle is that every institution is responsible for determining its own policies and practices with regard to the transfer of credit. Institutions are encouraged to review their policies and practices regularly to ensure that their credit transfer/award policies align with their academic missions and strategic priorities, and function in a manner that is fair and equitable to students and take into consideration new sources for learning and alternative assessment methods. General guidelines such as this or others should be used as tools to help develop specific institutional
policies and practices, not in lieu of such institutional policies.

Transfer and award of credit is a concept that increasingly involves transfer between dissimilar institutions and curricula and recognition of extra-institutional learning, as well as transfer between institutions and curricula with similar characteristics. As their personal circumstances and educational objectives change, students seek to have their learning, wherever and however attained, recognized by institutions where they enroll for further study. It is important for reasons of social equity and educational effectiveness for all institutions to develop reasonable and well-articulated policies and procedures for the consideration of credit for such learning experiences, as well as for the potential transfer of credits earned at another institution. Such policies and procedures should provide maximum consideration for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. It is the receiving institution's responsibility to provide reasonable and well-articulated policies and procedures for determining a student's knowledge in required subject areas. All sending institutions have a responsibility to furnish transcripts, syllabi and other documents necessary for a receiving institution to judge the quality and quantity of the student's work. Institutions also have a responsibility to advise the student that the work reflected on the transcript may or may not be accepted by a receiving institution as bearing the same (or any) credits as those awarded by the provider institution, that the evaluation of credit is not always consistent among institutions, or that the credits awarded will be applicable to the specific academic degree or credential the student is pursuing.

Inter-Institutional Transfer of Credit

Transfer of credit from one institution to another involves at least three considerations:

1. the educational quality of the learning experience which the student seeks to transfer;
2. the comparability of the nature, content and level of the learning experience to that offered by the receiving institution; and
3. the appropriateness and applicability of the learning experience to the programs offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals.

Accredited Institutions

Accreditation addresses primarily the first of these considerations, serving as the basic indicator that an institution meets certain minimum standards. The goal of accreditation is to give students and policymakers confidence in the effectiveness of an institution’s or program’s academic quality and that it has the resources necessary to accomplish its goals. Accreditation speaks to the probability that students have met acceptable standards of educational accomplishment.

Users of accreditation are urged to give careful attention to the accreditation conferred by accrediting bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education. Both have a formal process that requires that all recognized accrediting bodies meet the same standards. Although accrediting agencies vary in the ways they are organized and in their statements of scope and mission, all accrediting bodies that
meet the CHEA and Department of Education standards for recognition must demonstrate that they require the institutions or programs to meet generally accepted standards.

**Determining Comparability of Coursework**

Accreditation does not address questions about the comparability of the nature, content, and level of potential transfer credit. These questions are as important in the evaluation process as the accreditation status of the institution where the student originally earned his or her credit. Since accreditation does not address these questions, this information must be obtained from catalogues, syllabi and other materials and from direct contact between knowledgeable and experienced faculty and staff at both the receiving and sending institutions. When such considerations as comparability and appropriateness of credit are satisfied, however, the receiving institution should have reasonable confidence that students from accredited institutions are qualified to undertake the receiving institution's educational program. In its articulation and transfer policies, the institution should judge courses, programs and other learning experiences on their learning outcomes and the existence of valid evaluation measures, including third-party expert review.

**Admissions and Degree Purposes**

At some institutions there may be differences between the acceptance of credit for admission purposes and the applicability of credit for degree requirements or about the appropriateness and applicability of the credit a student has earned at one institution to the programs offered by the institution where the student seeks to transfer that credit. Previous work, because of its nature and not necessarily its inherent quality, may have no applicability to a specific degree to be pursued by the student and may be considered for elective credit only. Institutions have a responsibility to make this distinction, and its implications, clear to students before they decide to enroll. This should be a matter of full disclosure, with the best interests of the student in mind. Institutions also should make every reasonable effort to reduce the gap between elective credits and credits applied toward specific requirements of an educational degree or credential.

**Additional Criteria for Transfer Decisions**

These additional criteria are intended to sustain academic quality in an environment of more varied transfer, assure consistency of transfer practice, and encourage appropriate transparency about transfer policy and practice.

- **Balance in the Use of Accreditation Status in Transfer Decisions**: Institutions and accreditors should ensure that decisions about awarding transfer credit are not made solely on the source of accreditation of the sending program or institution. While acknowledging that accreditation is an important factor, receiving institutions ought to make clear their institutional reasons for accepting or not accepting credits that students seek to transfer. Students should have reasonable explanations about how work for which students seek transfer credit is or is not of sufficient quality when compared with the receiving institution and how work is or is not comparable with curricula and
standards to meet degree requirements of the receiving institution.

- **Consistency:** Institutions and accreditors should reaffirm that the considerations that inform credit award decisions are applied consistently in the context of a higher education landscape where more students are trying to transfer more credit and there are a number of new higher education providers offering more potential sources of transfer credit. This increases the number and type of transfer credit issues that institutions will need to address—making consistency even more important in the future.

- **Effective and Transparent Public Communication:** Institutions and accreditors should ensure that students and the public are fully and accurately informed about their respective transfer credit policies and practices. The public has a significant interest in higher education's effective management of transfer credit, especially in an environment of expanding access and increased mobility. Colleges and universities are the stewards of significant taxpayer dollars, such as state investments in public institutions or federal student aid funding. This funding is accompanied by public expectations that the transfer credit process is built on a strong commitment to fairness and efficiency.

- **Commitment to Address Innovation:** Institutions and accreditors should be flexible and open in considering alternative transfer credit approaches that might benefit students, including credit earned through alternative means, such as competency-based, distance, and online learning and other applications of technology.

**Evaluation of Extra-Institutional and Experiential Learning for Purposes of Transfer and Award of Credit**

Transfer and award of credit policies should encompass educational accomplishments attained in extra-institutional settings, such as those gained in the workplace, military or community. Assessment and credit recommendations for extra-institutional learning, or prior learning, has been in place since World War I, when returning military veterans were provided opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in order to gain high school credentials and enter postsecondary education programs. Since then, nationally recognized methods of assessment and credit recommendations have been developed. Those methods include third-party validation of learning offered outside traditional classrooms by the military and civilian organizations, including private employers, government agencies, training providers, institutes, labor unions, national examination programs and online education vendors. Institutions also have created tools for individualized assessment to document college-level equivalencies through informal learning. Like any transfer credit, colleges and universities have the responsibility for determining transfer awards for credit for prior learning options.

**Uses of This Statement**

Institutions are encouraged to use this statement as a basis for discussions in developing and reviewing institutional policies with regards to the transfer and award of credit for learning that has taken place in a variety of settings. Institutions may use the guidelines included in this statement to inform faculty, staff, students and other constituencies. It is also recommended that accrediting bodies reflect the essential precepts of this statement in their criteria.
Signed

Mike Reilly, Executive Director
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
October 2, 2017

Ted Mitchell, President
American Council on Education
October 2, 2017

Judith Eaton, President
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
October 2, 2017

[Applicable Standards: 7]

Original 1978 statement endorsed by ABHE Board October 1983;
Revised 2017 statement endorsed by ABHE Commission on Accreditation, June 2018
Policy on Validating Credits Earned at Unaccredited Institutions

In dealing with transfer-of-credit issues, ABHE institutions are referred to the Statement on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit approved by CHEA, ACE, and AACRAO. This statement provides that “Institutions admitting students from unaccredited institutions should take special steps to validate credits previously earned.”

Proper validation will demonstrate that course work taken in the sending institution is comparable to course work offered by the accredited receiving institution. It may be accomplished by some combination of the following means:

1. Demonstration of achievement by means of comprehensive examinations.

2. Review of syllabi, faculty credentials, grading standards, and other relevant learning resources at the sending institution.

3. Analysis of historic experience regarding the success of transfers from the sending institution.

4. Successful completion of a prescribed amount of study at the receiving institution.

Institutions will retain documentation in the student’s permanent file outlining the process used to validate credits accepted from unaccredited sending institutions. This documentation will serve as the basis for self-study of institutional practices relative to validation of transfer credits from unaccredited institutions.

[Applicable Standards: 7; Applicable Policy: Policy on Transfer and the Award of Academic Credit]

Adopted October 1983
Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment and Representation of Accredited Status

All accredited postsecondary institutions, or individuals acting on their behalf, must exhibit integrity and responsibility in advertising, student recruitment, and representation of accredited status. Responsible self-regulation requires rigorous attention to principles of good practice.

General

1. Educational programs and services offered should be the primary emphasis of all advertisements, publications, promotional literature, and recruitment activities.

2. All statements and representations should be clear, factually accurate, and current. Supporting information should be kept on file and readily available for review.

3. Catalogs and other official publications should be readily available and accurately depict the following:
   a. Programmatic purposes and objectives;
   b. Entrance requirements and procedures;
   c. Basic information on programs and courses;
   d. Degree and program completion requirements, including length of time required to obtain a degree or certificate of completion;
   e. Faculty (full-time and part-time listed separately) with degrees held and the institutions conferring these degrees;
   f. Institutional facilities that are readily available for educational use;
   g. Rules and regulations for conduct;
   h. Tuition, fees, and other program costs;
   i. Opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and
   j. Policies and procedures for refunding fees to students who withdraw from the institution.

4. In institution catalogs and/or official publications describing career opportunities, clear and accurate information should be provided on the following:
   a. National and/or state legal requirements for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered, and
   b. Any unique requirements for career paths or for employment and advancement opportunities in the profession or occupation described.
   c. Address and telephone number of the accrediting body.

Student Recruitment

1. Student recruitment should be conducted by well-qualified admissions officers and trained volunteers whose credentials, purposes, and position or affiliation with the institution or program are clearly specified.
2. Independent contractors or agents used by the institution for recruiting purposes will be governed by the same principles as institutional admissions officers and volunteers.

3. The following practices in student recruitment are to be scrupulously avoided:
   a. Assuring future employment, unless employment opportunities have been made and can be verified
   b. Misrepresenting job placement and employment opportunities for graduates
   c. Misrepresenting program costs
   d. Misrepresenting abilities required to complete an intended program
   e. Offering to agencies or individual persons money or inducements other than educational services in exchange for student enrollment. (Except for awards of privately-endowed restricted funds, grants or scholarships are to be offered only on the basis of specific standards related to merit or financial need.)

Representation of Accredited Status

1. The term “accreditation” is to be used only when accredited status is conferred by an accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the U.S. Secretary of Education.

2. No statement should be made about possible future accreditation status or qualification not yet conferred by the accrediting body. Statements like the following are not permissible: “(Name of institution or program) has applied for candidate status with the COA of the Association for Biblical Higher Education” or “The program is being evaluated by the COA of the Association for Biblical Higher Education, and it is anticipated that accreditation will be granted in the near future.”

3. Any reference to state or provincial approval should be limited to a brief statement concerning the actual charter, incorporation, license, or registration that has been given by the state or province.

4. The phrase “fully accredited” should be avoided because partial accreditation is not possible.

5. When accredited status is affirmed in institutional catalogs and other official publications, it should be stated accurately and fully in a comprehensive statement, including the following:
   a. Identifying the accrediting body by name
   b. Indicating the scope of accreditation as institutional or programmatic
   c. Indicating the address and telephone number of the accrediting body.

6. The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented.
   a. The accreditation granted by an institutional accrediting body has reference to the quality of the institution as a whole. Since institutional accreditation does not imply
specific accreditation of any particular program in the institution, statements like “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading.
b. “Freestanding” institutions offering programs in a single field, e.g., a school of art, engineering, theology, granted accreditation by a regional or national institutional accrediting body alone, should clearly state that this accreditation does not imply specialized accreditation of the programs offered.

Member agencies of CHEA should assume responsibility for informing the CHEA office of improper or misleading advertising or unethical practices that come to their attention, so that CHEA may inform the appropriate accrediting association or associations.

Accreditation Statements

1. Statement on Applicant Status
   Applicant institutions are to accurately reflect the nature of “applicant status” in their catalogs and other advertising. The following statement must be used to define applicant status:
   
   [Institution Name] holds applicant status with the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (5850 T. G. Lee Blvd., Ste. 130, Orlando, FL 32822, 407.207.0808). Applicant status is a pre-membership status granted to those institutions that meet the ABHE Conditions of Eligibility and that possess such qualities as may provide a basis for achieving candidate status within five years.

2. Statement on Candidate Status
   Candidate institutions are to accurately reflect the nature of “candidate status” in their catalogs and other advertising. The following statement must be used to define candidate status:
   
   [Institution Name] holds candidate status with the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (5850 T. G. Lee Blvd., Ste. 130, Orlando, FL 32822, 407.207.0808). Candidate status is a pre-accreditation status granted to those institutions that meet the ABHE Conditions of Eligibility and that possess such qualities as may provide a basis for achieving accreditation status within five years.

3. Statement on Accredited Status (Institutional Accreditation)
   Accredited institutions are to accurately reflect the nature of accredited status in their catalogs and other advertising.

   For use when graduate education has been accredited:
   
   [Institution Name] is accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (5850 T. G. Lee Blvd., Ste. 130, Orlando, FL 32822, 407.207.0808) to grant certificates and degrees at the Associate, Baccalaureate, Master’s, and Doctoral levels.
For use when undergraduate education only has been accredited:

[Institution Name] is accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (5850 T. G. Lee Blvd., Ste. 130, Orlando, FL 32822, 407.207.0808) to grant certificates and degrees at the Associate and Baccalaureate levels.

4. Statement on Accredited Status (Programmatic Accreditation)
The following statement must be used in the public documents of institutions that hold Programmatic Accreditation with the ABHE:

The Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Ste. 130, Orlando, FL 32822, 407.207.0808) accredits the following programs: [list the specific programs that are accredited].

[Applicable Standards: 3 & 7a]

Adopted October 1983; Revised February 1997, February 2015
Policy on Academic Quality
As Related to Institutional Mission

ABHE-accredited institutions will have up-to-date, clearly articulated statements of mission, institutional goals, and student learning objectives appropriate to higher education and designed to equip students for a life of service to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (see the Policy on Outcomes).

ABHE-accredited institutions will have defined student learning outcomes and documented evidence that the outcomes are being achieved (see the Policy on Outcomes).

ABHE-accredited institutions will offer educational programs, student learning experiences, and support services that meet the needs of the student population served and result in student success. Evidence of these qualities is reflected in acceptable graduation/transfer out and retention rates as expected in the Policy and Procedures for Monitoring Annual Report Data.

ABHE-accredited institutions will engage students with faculty members who are committed to the institutional mission and competent in their instructional disciplines. The evidence of these qualities is reflected in the percentage of student credits taken with faculty members holding the appropriate academic preparation and professional expertise as expected in the Policy and Procedures for Monitoring Annual Report Data.

ABHE-accredited institutions will demonstrate the acquisition and management of resources necessary to fulfill the mission of the institution and sustain its educational programs. Evidence of these qualities is reflected in a satisfactory Financial Responsibility Composite Score and positive responses to the Financial Compliance Questions on the Annual Report (see the Policy and Procedures for Monitoring Annual Report Data).

Adopted February 2007; Revised February 2021
Policies Relating to Commission on Accreditation Procedures
Policy and Procedures for Institutional Accreditation

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 accreditation relationship is a voluntary association intended “to engender a willing and cooperative environment for review and improvement of educational programs” at institutions of higher education (July 19, 2022 Department of Education Letter to Institutional Accreditation Agencies).

1. Applicant Status

A. Attaining Applicant Status

An institution desiring applicant status with the Commission on Accreditation (COA) must contact the COA office to schedule a one-day preliminary visit by a member of COA professional staff to the institution’s campus. The staff visit must be completed during the 24 months prior to the institution’s application submission. The purpose of the visit is to assist the institution in understanding the process and timetable for accreditation, and to provide the COA with a preliminary assessment of the institution’s achievement of the Conditions of Eligibility.

The institution should submit one electronic copy (pdf) of the following documents to coa@abhe.org by the due date for consideration by the COA at the next COA meeting. Applications are considered on a rolling basis as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Commission on Accreditation Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>October/November</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15</td>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Application documents:

1. A completed COA application form, including documentation submitted to the U.S. Department of Education seeking approval to change accreditors or add an accreditor, and documentation of Department of Education approval to do so, if applicable*.

*Institutions holding accredited status with another U.S. Department of Education (USDE) recognized institutional accreditor are required to submit materials to USDE demonstrating reasonable cause for changing their accrediting agency or for having multiple accrediting agencies. Institutions must submit such materials and receive USDE approval prior to submitting an application to ABHE.
2. An official letter from the chief executive officer stating the board of control's desire for the institution to pursue accreditation with the COA,

3. An official statement from the chief executive officer reflecting a board of control decision to affirm support of the ABHE Tenets of Faith,

4. A document demonstrating compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility, and

5. A check for the application fee sent by postal mail to the COA office within 24 hours of submission of the application documents (made out to COA).

The COA’s Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status (APCAN) will review these materials and determine whether to grant or deny applicant status or defer action. The committee’s decision is based upon whether it believes the institution has demonstrated compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility and appears to be able to achieve candidate status within a maximum of five years.

Since decisions regarding candidate status, initial accreditation, and reaffirmation of accreditation are generally made only at the February COA meeting, an institution granted applicant status at the summer or fall COA meeting will be placed on the accreditation timeline as if starting the following February—an institution granted applicant status in June or November would have a maximum of five years from the following February to achieve candidate status, and that February to the following February would be considered the institution’s initial year of applicant status.

An institution denied applicant status must wait one year before reapplying. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for applicant status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of APCAN.

B. Maintaining Applicant Status

New applicant institutions are expected to send one or more representatives to the two-day Achieving Accreditation Standards Conference (new applicant orientation) held at the ABHE office in the institution’s first year of applicant status (usually May/June). The workshop provides guidance on satisfying the Standards for Accreditation and the Essential Elements within each standard. Institutions will conduct a self-assessment of compliance with the standards/essential elements as part of the workshop.

An applicant institution must demonstrate progress in moving toward candidate status. An annual one-day visit by a member of the COA’s professional staff is required in any year in which the institution does not host a visiting team. The Standards Self-assessment is completed prior to each annual staff visit. The evaluation should be submitted to the staff representative at least one week prior to the scheduled visit. The COA staff representative will analyze the institution with respect to the Standards for
Accreditation and advise the institution concerning organization for self-study, assessment, and institutional planning. APCAN will annually review the institution’s progress report, the staff representative’s report, the institution’s financial audit report for the recently completed fiscal year, and data from its completed online annual report. The committee will make a report to the COA, which is responsible for making a determination whether sufficient progress is being made to warrant the continuation of applicant status. Continued applicant status is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in self-study seminars offered by the Commission.

In November of the third year of applicant status, the institution is expected to submit self-study documents to the COA Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status (APCAN). The committee will review the documents and assess the institution’s readiness to host an evaluation team visit in the following fall. When an institution is not ready to submit a self-study, the institution may invoke the contingency year (fifth year of applicant status) and defer the evaluation team visit until the final year of applicant status. Where the desire to delay the self-study and/or team visit is initiated by the institution, a formal letter of request must be submitted to APCAN explaining the rationale for the delay and the extenuating circumstances that make the request necessary.

If APCAN determines that the self-study requires more work before the team visit for candidate status, APCAN will direct the institution to make the necessary improvements. In rare cases where the self-study needs extension revision, APCAN may invoke the contingency year (fifth year of applicant status) and defer the evaluation team visit until the final year of applicant status.

Institutions should note that when the contingency year has been utilized, the COA decision must be to grant candidate status or remove applicant status completely. A deferral of action with additional time to resolve issues is not an option at that point.

[See also: Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

2. Candidate Status

A. Attaining Candidate Status

The institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report of the institution’s self-study in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to
be submitted to coa@abhe.org no later than November 15 prior to an evaluation team visit scheduled for the fall of the institution’s fourth year of applicant status.

An institution making significant progress may request to accelerate the timeline and submit self-study documents early for review. In such instances, the institution must submit a written request to accelerate the process to candidate status to APCAN at least one committee meeting prior to submission of the self-study. The due date for self-studies is November 15; therefore, the request to accelerate must be received by May 15. The request must be accompanied by a progress report addressing the institution’s resolution of any prior concerns noted in action letters and the institution’s readiness to demonstrate satisfaction of all Institutional Accreditation Standards. In exceptional circumstances, an applicant institution that demonstrates substantial compliance with all standards and essential elements may include in its request to accelerate a request for consideration of initial accreditation. The decision concerning acceleration will be informed by the institution’s past compliance with reporting deadlines, the number and seriousness of concerns communicated in prior action letters, and how well the institution has addressed prior concerns in its progress reports.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution’s self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution’s achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has systems in place for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the institution’s readiness for advancement to candidate status.

Institution representatives will be given an opportunity to appear before the COA as it considers the evaluation team report and the institution’s response to the team report and determines whether to grant or deny candidate status or defer action. The COA’s decision is based upon whether the institution appears able to achieve accredited status within a maximum of five years.

An institution denied candidate status must wait one year before seeking reinstatement to applicant or candidate status. If desired, it may appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Appeals. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for candidate status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of the COA.

B. Maintaining Candidate Status

A candidate institution must demonstrate progress in moving toward accredited status. An annual one-day visit by a member of the COA professional staff is required in any year in which the institution does not host a visiting team. The Standards Self-assessment is completed prior to each annual staff visit. The evaluation should be submitted to the staff representative at least one week prior to the scheduled visit. The COA staff representative will analyze the institution with respect to the Standards for Accreditation and advise the institution concerning organization for self-study,
assessment, and institutional planning. APCAN will annually review the institution’s progress report, the staff representative’s report, the institution’s financial audit report for the recently completed fiscal year, and data from its completed online annual report. The committee will make a report to the COA, which is responsible for making a determination whether sufficient progress is being made to warrant the continuation of candidate status. Continued candidate status is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in self-study seminars offered by the Commission.


3. Accredited Status

A. Attaining Accredited Status

A candidate institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report, of the institution’s self-study, in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to be submitted to coa@abhe.org no later than November 15 prior to an evaluation team visit scheduled for the fall of the institution’s fourth year of candidate status.

An institution making significant progress may request to accelerate the timeline and submit self-study documents early for review. In such instances, the institution must submit a written request to accelerate the process to accredited status to APCAN at least one committee meeting prior to submission of the self-study. The due date for self-studies is November 15; therefore, the request to accelerate must be received by May 15. The request must be accompanied by a progress report addressing the institution’s resolution of any prior concerns noted in action letters and the institution’s readiness to demonstrate satisfaction of all Institutional Accreditation Standards. The decision concerning acceleration will be informed by the institution’s past compliance with reporting deadlines, the number and seriousness of concerns communicated in prior action letters, and how well the institution has addressed prior concerns in its progress reports.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution’s self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution’s achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has systems in place for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the institution’s readiness for advancement to accredited status.
Institution representatives will be given an opportunity to appear before the COA as it considers the evaluation team report and the institution’s response to the team report and determine whether to grant or deny initial accreditation or defer action. The COA’s decision is based upon the Principle for Accreditation, i.e., that an institution is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its own mission and objectives and the Standards for Accreditation, and that it is committed to ongoing institutional development.

An institution denied accredited status must wait one year before seeking reinstatement to applicant, candidate, or accredited status. If desired, it may appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Appeals. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for accredited status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of the COA.

B. Maintaining Accredited Status

Continued accreditation is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. In the third year of accreditation, a supplementary evaluation visit will be conducted by a representative of the COA in order to verify the progress reported by the institution.

C. Reaffirming Accredited Status

An accredited institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report of the institution’s self-study, in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to be submitted to coa@abhe.org not less than eight weeks prior to an evaluation team visit that will be scheduled for the spring of the institution’s fifth year of accredited status.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution’s self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution’s achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has in place a mechanism for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the reaffirmation of the institution’s accredited status.

The COA will consider the evaluation team report and the institution’s response to the team report and determine whether to reaffirm the institution’s accredited status. The COA’s decision is based upon the Principle for Accreditation, i.e., that an institution is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its own mission and objectives and the Standards for Accreditation, and that it is committed to ongoing institutional development.
An institution denied reaffirmation of accredited status may, if desired, appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Appeals.

Once reaffirmed, the institution will repeat the reaffirmation process every ten years. Institutions offering sub-baccalaureate vocational education may be required to host an unannounced visit between reaffirmation visits. The purpose of the visit will be to ensure that the institution has the personnel, facilities, and resources it has claimed to have and that it continues to comply with the Standards for Accreditation. These visits are conducted without the benefit of self-study materials. The COA will consider reports of unannounced visits at its regular meetings. Upon considering such reports, it will have the same range of decision-making options as are available for regular reaffirmation visits.

Five-year and ten-year reaffirmation visits will be conducted in the spring. In extenuating circumstances, an institution may petition the COA for a fall reaffirmation visit.

D. Title IV Noncompliance

As a consequence of the 1992 Higher Education Amendments, the U.S. Department of Education is more closely monitoring institutional compliance with Title IV (Federal Student Financial Assistance) requirements. Upon discovery that an institution is no longer in compliance with Title IV requirements, COA will conduct a special assessment to assure that the institution remains in substantial compliance with the COA’s Standards for Accreditation.


Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation

Institutions with Prior ABHE Institutional Accreditation

1. The institution CEO should submit a letter of request to the Commission on Accreditation (COA) expressing the desire to pursue programmatic accreditation status.

2. The institution provides evidence that it meets the Conditions of Eligibility for programmatic accreditation. The evidence provided will be reviewed by the COA’s Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status. The Committee will determine whether the Conditions have been sufficiently satisfied to authorize the preparation of self-study materials in view of a subsequent evaluative visit.

3. The institution should develop self-study materials in the form of a compliance document that, for the programs to be reviewed, demonstrates each program’s compliance with ABHE’s programmatic standards. The compliance document is due eight weeks prior to the date agreed upon for a team visit.

4. The institution should ensure that its assessment plan and planning documents are up-to-date and that they include consideration of the programs to be considered.

5. The institution will submit to the COA office staff three potential dates for the proposed team visit.

6. Upon identifying a team chair, the COA staff will confirm the actual date of the visit.

7. In addition to a chair, the COA staff will select other team member(s), the number to be determined in cooperation with the institution based on the range of programs to be reviewed. At least one team member will be a practitioner related to the fields of study covered by the programs to be examined, but who does not have a formal position with any ABHE institution.

8. A member of the COA staff will be designated to accompany the team for the purpose of providing specific training for the practitioner(s) on the team relative to the ABHE programmatic standards. The staff member will also provide coaching services to the practitioner(s) during the course of the team visit.

9. Normally a team visit will last no less than one and one-half days, but the actual schedule will be determined by the team chair in cooperation with the institution and the COA staff.

10. Within two weeks of the visit, the team chair will distribute a report of the team’s findings to the COA staff.

11. Upon receipt of the team report, the COA staff will review the report for completeness and forward it onto the institution whose programs have been reviewed. The institution will be asked to respond to the report, indicating any errors of fact, disagreements with the findings, and/or responses to the team’s findings. The request for a response will include the deadline by which the response must be received.

12. Upon completion of its response, the institution will forward it to the COA staff for distribution to the COA at large.

13. The COA staff will supply the COA with the institution’s self-study materials, the report of the team, and the institution’s response to the team report.
14. Representatives of the institution will be asked to meet with the COA to respond to questions at the time the program(s) are considered for initial programmatic accreditation.

15. Based upon the results of the hearing, the COA will make a decision to grant, defer, or deny programmatic accreditation.

16. Institutions having programs that are accredited by ABHE will provide an annual report to the COA each year following guidelines supplied by the COA.

17. Normally, the COA will review the accreditation of the covered program(s) each ten years for reaffirmation of accreditation. However, the COA reserves the right to review a program at any time based upon information coming to its attention.

Procedures for Institutions with no Recent or Prior ABHE History

1. The institution must develop and submit a petition to the COA’s Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status demonstrating satisfaction of the Conditions of Eligibility for programmatic accreditation. The document must clearly identify all of the programs being submitted for consideration.

2. The Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status will review the institution’s submission and make a judgment regarding the petition’s satisfaction of the Conditions. Upon determining satisfactory compliance with the Conditions, the Committee will instruct the COA staff to communicate its decision to the institution.

3. The ABHE staff will provide the institution instructions for the preparation of the self-study materials for the accreditation of the program(s) being considered for accreditation.

4. Steps 2 through 17 from above are followed.

Adopted February 2010; Revised November 2011
Policy on Student Success and Institutional Culture

The Association for Biblical Higher Education’s (ABHE’s) commitment to student success and institutional cultures of belonging is rooted in and guided by its mission and the ABHE Tenets of Faith. In the context of biblical higher education, success and belonging is viewed as the degree to which an institution, consistent with its theological commitments, (1) reflects differences within its constituency in alignment with its admission, hiring, and nominating policies; (2) supports the efforts of every student to achieve a common definition of success; and (3) manifests a culture of belonging that includes access to institutional opportunities and resources regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, age, or disability.

COMMITMENTS

Success of Every Student
ABHE is committed to the success of every student enrolled at ABHE institutions and seeks to foster student success through its standards, policies, and processes. Our aspiration is that difference characteristics will not be predictors of student success at ABHE institutions.

Institutional Cultures of Belonging
ABHE institutions reflect a vast array of differences with respect to race, ethnicity, sex, age, and disability. ABHE seeks to foster institutional cultures of belonging through its standards, policies, and processes. Our aspiration is that difference characteristics will not be predictors of students’, employees’, or trustees’ sense of belonging at ABHE institutions.

ABHE will manifest a commitment to student success and institutional cultures of belonging through:

1. Accreditation standards and policies that foster student success and institutional cultures of belonging within the context of biblical higher education*.
2. Accreditation standards and policies requiring institutions to identify missional difference categories present in their learning communities and demonstrate a commitment to supporting the success of all students.
3. Accreditation standards and policies requiring institutions to assess student success in achieving institutional and program outcomes.
4. Agency collection and disaggregation of Annual Institutional Update (AIU) data to assess its effectiveness in supporting student success at ABHE institutions based on race, ethnicity, and sex.
5. ABHE leadership (Board of Directors, Commission on Accreditation, and staff) that reflects differences in race, ethnicity, and sex within Association membership in alignment with hiring and nominating policies.
6. ABHE conference and annual meeting presenters that reflect differences in race, ethnicity, and sex within its membership.
7. Commission on Accreditation team evaluator and appeal pools that reflect differences in race, ethnicity, and sex within COA-accredited membership.

* Institutional Integrity, Standard 3: EE 4; Governance, Standard 4: EE 8; Human Resources, Standard 6a: EE 4; Recruitment, Standard 7a: EE 4; Student Services, Standard 8: EE 3; Faculty Qualifications, Standard 9a: EE 11; Curriculum, Standard 11a: EE 4

Adopted June 2023
Policy on Institutions Where the Primary Instructional Language Is Other Than English

Policy

Institutions where the primary instructional language and the primary institutional document language is not English need to understand that communication with the Commission on Accreditation (COA) and the Association will be in English. This includes both oral and written communication, including institutional documents related to the accreditation process.

What the COA might expect from Applicant, Candidate, and Member Institutions

1. Materials submitted to the ABHE Office and COA must be in English. If a document is translated into English, the original document should also accompany the translation.

2. Accreditation-related presentations made to the COA will be in English.

3. English speakers need to be available to translate for team members during a team visit.

What Applicant, Candidate, and Member Institutions might expect from the COA

1. The COA will make every effort to place at least one team member on the visiting team that speaks the primary instructional language of the institution.

2. The COA will make every effort to help the institution network with educational professionals who speak the primary instructional language of the institution.

Adopted May 2007
Policy on the Assignment of Primary and Secondary Readers

Cases to be considered by the Commission on Accreditation (COA) as a whole will be assigned to both a primary and a secondary reader. This procedure enables a division of labor and assures objectivity. It also provides for thoroughness, the opportunity for a second opinion, and a backup, given the unforeseen absence of the primary reader.

To assure objectivity, enhance fairness, and avoid conflicts of interest, primary and secondary readers will not be assigned to a particular institution in the following circumstances:

- Current service at an institution with the same denominational/fellowship affiliation
- Current service at an institution with the same geographical base of constituency
- Previous employment as faculty or staff within the past ten years
- Previous service as a board member within the past ten years
- Previous service as a team evaluator within the past five years
- Previous service as an independent consultant within the past five years
- Previous service as a reader (primary or secondary) for a meeting of the full COA within a two-year period
- Acceptance of substantive gifts or honoraria for self or spouse apart from scheduled fees during the accreditation process, including any appeals processes
- Previous attendance at, or graduation from, the institution being considered
- Submission of an application for employment to the institution within the past five years
- Any situation that could affect an individual’s ability to be impartial

Commissioners will further agree to recuse themselves from consideration of any institution where they are aware of a potential conflict of interest. Recusal means that the Commissioner will declare a recusal before discussion begins, leave the table, and avoid participating in any discussion related to the institution or the decision that the COA makes relative to the institution under consideration. Only one reader will be assigned to committee deliberations.

Revised October 1990, October 1992, June 2014, February 2023
Policy on Commission on Accreditation
Records Management

The Commission on Accreditation (COA) will maintain complete and accurate records of:

1. Its last full accreditation or candidate status review of each institution or program including on-site evaluation team reports, the institution’s or program’s responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted by the COA between regular reviews, and the institution’s or program’s most recent self-study materials.

2. All decisions made throughout an institution’s or program’s affiliation with the COA regarding the accreditation and candidate status of any institution or program and substantive changes, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions.

In maintaining records, the COA will take reasonable and prudent measures to establish both the security and confidentiality of records in a manner consistent with good practice, its own policies, and applicable law. Confidential records will be released only to persons with a need to know as stipulated by the ABHE Policy on Confidentiality. Access to records is controlled by the COA staff.

Security of electronic records will be maintained according to best practices (e.g., password-protected access, backup solutions, encryption for data transfer, virus protection) to avoid loss or compromise.

Historic paper records will be stored in a locked facility. These records will be converted to electronic format as rapidly as possible in a manner consistent with good resource stewardship.

Adopted November 2011
Policy on Commission on Accreditation

Budget Development

Introduction

Under federal law, the Commission on Accreditation (COA) must be separate and independent of any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization. As a means for ensuring appropriate separation and independence, the COA must develop and determine its own budget, with no review or consultation with any other entity or organization. To further ensure appropriate separation and independence, the COA must pay fair market value for its proportionate share of any personnel, services, equipment or facilities jointly used by the COA and the ABHE membership association.

To a certain extent, COA decisions drive its budget. The numbers of institutions accepted into applicant status have a budgetary impact by determining the numbers of institutions pursuing the accreditation process. These decisions impact the demand for consultative visits held each year. They also impact the numbers of institutions to be assessed. The COA also determines the acceptance or rejection of institutions into candidate or accredited status, and the award of team visits for those institutions seeking initial accreditation. These decisions also impact the budget. (The visits scheduled for reaffirmation of accreditation are determined automatically by COA procedures.) Despite the budgetary impact of these decisions, the COA will base its decisions on educational quality considerations, not the budgetary implications of positive or negative decisions. The COA has the right to autonomously set fees for the various activities related to the accreditation process. It also has the right to establish an assessment fee for each student enrolled in a member institution. Through these mechanisms, the COA will ensure that its budgetary needs are met.

Procedure

1. The COA will review initiatives and plans that have potential impact on COA finances for the next fiscal year at the Fall COA meeting and provide guidance to the COA Executive Director for budget development.

2. The COA Executive Director will prepare a preliminary budget and fee schedule and circulate these to COA Officers for feedback prior to the February COA meeting. The preliminary budget will take into consideration COA initiatives, projected membership dues revenue, and the anticipated number of team visits, staff consultation visits, and applications for the next fiscal year, as well as projected general operating expenses. The Executive Director will revise the preliminary budget and fee schedule based on feedback from COA Officers.

3. The preliminary budget and fee schedule will be presented to the COA for discussion at the February COA meeting. The COA Executive Director in consultation with COA
Officers, will make revisions as appropriate based on the COA discussion and circulate a final proposal prior to the Summer COA meeting.

4. The COA will review and adopt a final budget and fee schedule at the Summer COA meeting. The COA will act on both the COA budget and schedule of COA fees and is the final authority on both the COA budget and COA fees.

5. Should it become necessary to make mid-year adjustments in the budget, the COA Executive Director will work with the COA Officers to prepare proposals that will be circulated to the entire COA for adoption.

6. In setting fees, the COA will exercise care to minimize increases and to ensure that there is a reasonable relationship between the value of the services offered and the charges assessed.

Adopted November 2006; Revised June 2015
Policy on Changes to the Commission on Accreditation’s Policies, Procedures, and Standards

The Commission on Accreditation (COA) is the accreditation authority within the Association and is recognized as such by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education. Hence, it is the COA, through its Committee on Criteria, that is responsible for assuring that the Conditions of Eligibility, Principle for Accreditation, and Standards for Accreditation, together with all accreditation policies and procedures, are kept current.

Procedure for making additions, deletions, or modifications to the COA’s accreditation policies, procedures, and Standards

1. **Initiation.** Recommendations for addition, deletion, or modification to the COA’s accreditation policies, procedures, or Standards may originate from any source. Individuals or institutions should direct their recommendations to the COA Executive Director, who will place them on the agenda of the Committee on Criteria.

2. **Consideration by the Committee on Criteria.** Recommendations will be studied by the Committee on Criteria. If the committee agrees with the worthiness of a recommendation, it will express the proposal in language that is consistent in style and format with existing accreditation policies, procedures, and Standards, and recommend it to the COA for approval.

3. **Consideration by the COA.** Recommendations from the Committee on Criteria will be considered by the COA. If the COA agrees with the worthiness of a recommendation, it will recommend it to the ABHE membership. If the COA disagrees with the worthiness of a recommendation, it will either reject it or return it to the Committee on Criteria for further work.

4. **Circulation and publication.** Recommendations released by the COA will be circulated by electronic means or mail to the Association’s constituency. Recommendations related to Standards will also be circulated to member institutions, states, provinces, other recognized accrediting bodies, and the public. Constituents are requested to share the recommendations with their faculty, students, and supporters, who are, in turn, invited to forward comments to the COA Executive Director. Recommendations relating to accreditation Standards will, in addition, be published on the Association’s website. Readers are invited to forward comments to the COA Executive Director. The COA Executive Director will forward all comments to the Committee on Criteria of the COA for its consideration.

5. **Adoption.** Standards recommendations that have gained final approval from the COA are placed before the COA Delegate Assembly for a vote. This may be done electronically with a minimum window of ten (10) business days to receive votes or at
the Association’s annual meeting, or at a special meeting, for adoption. Standards recommendations may be adopted by majority vote, referred back to the Committee on Criteria, or rejected. Policy and procedural recommendations adopted by the COA do not require further approval by the COA Delegate Assembly.

6. **Exception.** The Committee on Criteria, with the assistance of the COA staff, has major responsibility for monitoring changes in the regulations and initiating action to maintain COA compliance with these changes. Based upon input from the Committee on Criteria, the COA will have authority to make changes needed to policies and procedures to maintain compliance with federal regulations on an “act and inform” basis. For such changes, the COA will not need to follow the normal procedures described above. The membership, however, having been informed of such changes, may petition the COA for an alternate means of complying with the regulations by submitting a petition to the COA Executive Director. The Executive Director, in turn, will submit the petition to the Committee on Criteria for processing as described by this paragraph.

7. **Implementation.** Newly adopted procedures become effective immediately upon approval. Institutions or programs have one year to comply with newly adopted policies. Unless otherwise specified by the COA, institutions or programs have two years to comply with newly adopted Standards.

Adopted October 1987; Revised October 1990, November 2007, April 2012, November 2012
Policy on Complaints Against the Commission on Accreditation

Complaints from member institutions or programs and their students, faculty, or employees regarding ABHE Standards, policies, or procedures will be submitted in writing to the Commission on Accreditation (COA) office for consideration by the COA Executive Director. The nature of these complaints, disposition, and method of handling will be included in the COA Executive Director’s report to the COA in accordance with the complaint review procedures. All complaints will be reported in the minutes of the next meeting of the appropriate committee of the COA.

Complaint Review Procedures

When a complaint is received by the COA Executive Director, the following actions will be taken:

1. Within 45 working days, the complainant is advised of this Policy on Complaints Against the COA and is asked to provide a clear, concise statement relating to the complaint and any documentation deemed necessary to support the case.

2. Within 45 working days of receipt of the statement, the COA Executive Director will review the complaint and supportive documentation to determine if the allegations are deemed to seriously affect the purposes or objectives of the COA. (Allegations are deemed to seriously affect the purposes or objectives of the COA when they relate to the process of accreditation and/or call into question the integrity of the COA.) A complete record of complaints filed with the COA Executive Director will be kept in the COA office.

3. If the complaint is not deemed to seriously affect the purposes or objectives of the COA, the COA Executive Director will respond indicating his judgment regarding the complaint’s lack of merit. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision, an appeal may be filed in accordance with the complaint appeals procedures outlined below.

4. When it has been deemed that the complaint endangers the purposes or objectives of the COA, the COA Executive Director will, within 45 working days, present the complaint to the appropriate COA committee for its consideration. Each member of the COA committee will receive a copy of the complaint and the accompanying documentation. Upon receipt of documentation, the members of the committee will, within 45 working days, advise the COA Executive Director of a possible resolution of the complaint. Upon receipt of the proposed resolution, the COA Executive Director will, within 45 days, inform the complainant of the suggested resolution.

5. If the resolution suggested by the COA committee is not acceptable to the complainant, the complainant may, within 45 working days, appeal the decision in accordance with the following complaint appeals procedures.
Complaint Appeals Procedure

Appeals of decisions will be filed with the COA committee chair, who is responsible for processing them. There are two levels of appeal.

First level of appeal (COA committee). At the first level, the appeal is filed with the COA committee. When the committee receives an appeal for the review of a complaint, it will act within 45 working days as follows:

1. It will consider the allegations of the complainant,
2. It will review the process completed by the COA Executive Director
3. It will study the evidence submitted in writing by the complainant in support of his allegations, and
4. It will provide a hearing for the complainant, if so requested.

If the appeal for the review of the complaint includes a request for a hearing, the committee will advise the complainant of the date, time, and place for the hearing at least thirty (30) days prior to the hearing. The course of the hearing will be controlled by the chair of the committee. The chair may limit the testimony of witnesses. Unless otherwise ordered by the committee, the hearing will last no longer than one day.

Second level of appeal (COA). If a complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the COA committee, further appeal can be made to the COA as a whole. Appeals at this level will be filed with the COA chair for processing.

When the COA receives an appeal for the review of a complaint, it will act within 45 working days as follows:

1. It will consider the allegations of the complainant,
2. It will review the process completed by the COA Executive Director and the COA committee,
3. It will study the evidence submitted in writing by the complainant in support of his allegations, and
4. It will provide a hearing for the complainant, if so requested.

If the appeal for the review of the complaint includes a request for a hearing, the COA will advise the complainant of the date, time, and place for the hearing at least thirty (30) days prior to the hearing. The course of the hearing will be controlled by the chair of the COA. The chair may limit the testimony of witnesses. Unless otherwise ordered by the COA, the hearing will last no longer than one day. The decision of the COA is final.
Costs

When hearings are requested, all costs relating to the hearings are borne by the complainant. At the first level of appeal, the complainant will post a $2,000 bond with the COA prior to the scheduling of the hearing. At the second level of appeal, a $5,000 bond will be posted.

Should the COA be found at fault in the decision on a complaint, it will be required to bear the expenses of convening the hearing body.

Adopted October 1982; Revised October 1987, 1997; November 2007
Policy on Complaints Against an Institution or Accredited Program

Purpose and Limitations

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) values reports from students, employees, or other interested parties concerning institutions that are perceived to be significantly out of compliance with ABHE standards, policies, or procedures. The purpose of such notification is to address compliance with the standards.

The COA will not mediate disputes between individuals and member institutions or review individual cases of admission, grades, granting or transferability of credits, application of academic policies, fees or other financial matters, disciplinary matters, contractual rights and obligations, personal comments, or administrative decisions. The COA also will not serve as a grievance panel when the outcome of institutional grievance or appeal processes is unsatisfactory to the complainant. The COA will not seek damages or restitution on behalf of the complainant and will not accept statements that include profanity or defamatory comments. If an institution is found out of compliance with ABHE standards, policy, or procedures, the COA will take appropriate action as needed.

Where a complaint may be addressed through institutional grievance processes, the COA requires evidence that all institutional grievance and appeal processes have been fulfilled and that noncompliance with ABHE standards, policies, or procedures continues after the grievance or appeal process has been completed. The COA will not act on a complaint under litigation or criminal investigation until such action (and appeal, if applicable) has been completed; however, if there is credible evidence that the institution is systemically out of compliance with ABHE standards, the COA may consider such evidence apart from disputed allegations. The Commission will not make judgments concerning the legality of an action.

ABHE Commission on Accreditation is not a regulatory agency, and its authority is limited to actions related to accreditation review and recognition, to which an institution submits voluntarily. The COA will only consider complaints that evidence significant noncompliance with ABHE standards, policies, or procedures for ABHE applicant, candidate, or accredited institutions.

The COA considers only recent events in complaints. One of the following must apply for ABHE to act on the complaint: (1) the event(s) occurred less than two years ago, (2) grievance/appeal was exhausted less than one year ago, or (3) litigation/legal proceedings (and appeal) were final less than one year ago.

Institutional Responsibilities

ABHE standards require that institutions have published procedures for addressing formal student complaints and grievances and that there be equitable and consistent treatment of

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employees and students consistent with published policies (see Standard 3, Essential Elements 2, 4; Standard 8, Essential Element 8). The institution must maintain a record of formal complaints since its last decennial review and make those available to visiting teams during evaluations.

Furthermore, institutions may not take retaliatory action against any individual who has filed a complaint with the COA. Institutions are expected to cooperate fully with any investigation of complaints, and any allegation of retaliatory action will be subject to investigation by the COA as a breach of Standard 3 (Integrity).

**Process**

Complaints and supporting documentation must be submitted in writing to the COA Executive Director via email at coa@abhe.org or postal mail at 5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 130, Orlando, FL 32822. Complaints will be processed by the COA staff in accordance with the Policy on Complaints Against an Institution or Accredited Program.

A copy of the complaint and related documentation will be furnished to the institution, and the institution will have the right to provide a response before the complaint is reviewed by the appropriate subcommittee of the COA. Any directive by the complainant to conceal identities or information from the institution will be disregarded. The complainant should not reveal any fact or opinion that the complainant does not want to be shared with the institution. All individuals named as complainants must affirm by signature their support of the complaint (i.e., one individual cannot sign on behalf of other complainants).

Occasionally, the COA or its staff receives anonymous complaints or media reports regarding an institution that holds standing with the COA. While anonymous complaints and media reports are reported to the appropriate subcommittee of the COA, in the absence of a pattern of such complaints, no action is taken unless directed by the subcommittee.

All complaints are reported to the appropriate subcommittee at the next scheduled meeting after processing. Where there is a pattern of complaints, the COA may take whatever action it deems appropriate, including no immediate action, requiring progress reports, conducting focused visits, or imposing sanctions.

It is the responsibility of the complainant to (1) identify which ABHE Standards/Essential Elements, policies, or procedures have been violated (see the *Commission on Accreditation Manual* at https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents for details), (2) clearly and succinctly describe how the institution has failed to satisfy ABHE requirements, and (3) document through evidence that compliance failures have occurred. The COA does not investigate undocumented allegations unless there is a pattern of noncompliance on record. The COA is also not obligated to receive additional documentation from the complainant after the initial submission of the complaint.
All complaints must be submitted using the Complaint Form available at https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents.

Level One Complaint

1. When an inquiry or notice of intent to file a complaint is received by the COA Office, the complainant is provided a copy of the Policy on Complaints Against an Institution or Accredited Program and a copy of the Complaint Form within 10 working days.

2. When a documented complaint is received, the COA Executive Director or Director’s designee will review the documentation within 60 calendar days to determine the following: (1) the complainant has clearly identified the ABHE standards/essential elements, policies, or procedures that the institution has violated; (2) the complainant has clearly and succinctly identified how the institution has violated standards, policies, or procedures; (3) the complainant has documented with evidence noncompliance with ABHE standards, policies, or procedures; (4) the complainant has documented that institutional grievance and/or appeal procedures have been exhausted or affirms that institutional grievance and/or appeal procedures are not available to the complainant; (5) the complainant affirms that the incident(s) leading to the complaint are not currently under litigation or criminal investigation; and (6) the complainant(s) has (have) signed the complaint. (Note: electronic copies are preferred for all materials.) If any of these is not appropriately documented, the complainant will be notified of the deficiency and be given 30 days to resubmit the complaint.

3. The COA Executive Director or Director’s designee will notify the chief executive officer of the institution against which the complaint and supporting documentation has been directed. The chief executive officer will receive a copy of the complaint and will be requested to reply in writing within thirty (30) days of the date of notification.

4. When satisfactorily documented, the complaint will be placed on the appropriate subcommittee agenda for review: Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change for accredited institutions, Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status for applicant and candidate institutions, or Committee on Financial Exigency for complaints relating primarily to financial matters.

5. Both parties will be notified within 30 calendar days after the effective date of the subcommittee decision and have 30 calendar days to accept or reject the decision of the COA subcommittee. If one or both parties are dissatisfied with the decision, the complaint may be advanced to a Level Two Complaint.

Level Two Complaint

1. When a complaint is advanced to Level Two, the COA Executive Director or Director’s designee will begin arrangements for a hearing panel within 30 calendar days of notification.
The panel will be composed of five persons, three of whom will be appointed by the COA Executive Director from among current or former Commissioners (not on the committee in Level One) and/or senior team evaluators. The Executive Director will select one of the three to be the chair of the hearing panel. Both the institution and the complainants will be offered an opportunity to nominate one panelist each to represent their respective interests. In order to be confirmed, the nominated panelists must agree to sign the confidentiality agreement attached to this policy. The panel will assemble at the ABHE Office in Orlando, FL on a mutually agreed upon date. If agreement on a date cannot be achieved, the chair will pick a date reflecting majority acceptability.

2. The panel will conduct a special meeting for the purpose of reviewing the complaint. The panel chair will conduct the meeting and will have the power to limit the testimony of any witnesses. Each party to the complaint may be represented at the hearing by whomsoever it chooses. The party requesting the hearing will pay the filing fee and post the bond for the hearing (see below).

3. Upon the conclusion of a hearing between the complainant and the institution, the hearing panel may choose to:

   (a) issue a final disposition to both parties and notify the COA of its decision; or

   (b) require a focused evaluation team visit to review the allegations of the complainant. The visit will be conducted by a team of three experienced evaluators from ABHE-accredited institutions/programs assigned by the COA Executive Director or Director’s designee. The institution has the right to reject any member of the proposed evaluation team if a conflict of interest is identified.

   The evaluation team will review the complaint prior to the visit. The purpose of the focused visit is to investigate the allegations of the complaint and assess whether or not the institution is in substantial compliance with ABHE standards, policies, and procedures in the specific area of the complaint.

   The team may also make inquiry of the complainant regarding the facts, nature, and records related to the complaint. The evaluation team will advise the hearing panel of its findings. The hearing panel will take final action upon receipt of the recommendations of the team.

   The hearing panel may require an institution to take corrective steps. The hearing panel will establish the deadline for corrective action and forward the panel’s decision and the evaluation team report to the appropriate subcommittee of the COA for monitoring and verification of fulfillment.

4. The COA may, at its discretion, publish the findings and decision of a hearing panel via the COA website.
5. Failure to follow the recommendations of the hearing panel will cause that institution or program to be reviewed by the COA regarding the institution or program’s accredited status. Upon completion of all phases of the complaint review process, the hearing panel action will be considered final for both parties.

**Costs for a Hearing Panel**

When special hearings are requested or an evaluation team visit is required by a hearing panel, all related costs are to be borne by the party determined to be at fault by the hearing panel. The party requesting the hearing will be required to pay a $500 nonrefundable filing fee and post a $5,000 bond with the COA pending a decision regarding the complaint. Should an institution or program be found at fault in a complaint, it will be required to reimburse the complainant for all expenses in the processing of the complaint. Should an institution or program not be found at fault in a complaint, the complainant will be required to reimburse the institution for all expenses in the processing of the complaint. When the fault cannot be clearly determined, the costs will be assessed at the discretion of the hearing panel.
Confidentiality Agreement for Complaint Hearing Panels

Introduction

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation Policy for dealing with complaints against institutions or programs that hold status with the COA provides two levels of review. The second level provides for a hearing by a five-member panel. Each party to the complaint has the prerogative of nominating one member of the hearing panel. For service on the panel, the nominated individual must agree to abide by the confidentiality agreement described below. Failure to enter into the confidentiality agreement will result in a declaration that the nominated individual is ineligible for service on the panel and result in the loss of the nominating party's ability to recommend a person for panel service. Should this occur, the COA Executive Director will appoint a panelist to fill the vacancy created. Should it be found that a panelist who has entered into this agreement has violated this confidentiality policy, the violator will be subject to legal action.

Matters that are Confidential

ABHE has a general statement regarding confidentiality. The materials described by this policy are to be treated as confidential. These materials include self-study materials, evaluation documents, progress reports, institutional financial documents, minutes relating to COA decisions regarding the Institution, and action letters communicating COA decisions regarding the institution. Additionally, correspondence, testimony, and related materials developed in efforts to implement each step of this complaint policy will be regarded as confidential. Such materials will be released only on a "need to know" basis, but the institution will have the right to make public its own documents. It can also permit panelists to exercise the prerogative of making documents under its control public. The complainants will also have similar powers to those reserved for institutions to control access to materials related to their complaint.

Agreement Confirmed

As a panelist serving on a hearing panel related to the complaint process, I agree to abide by the terms of this agreement.
Policy on Compliance with 
U.S. Department of Education Regulations

It is the policy of ABHE to comply with U.S. Department of Education (USDE) regulations. Most compliance matters are imbedded within the Commission on Accreditation’s (COA) regular policies, procedures, and Standards. The following compliance issues are either not covered by other policies and procedures or require the combination of several documents to demonstrate compliance and are therefore comparatively obscure. These are summarized below to facilitate a clear understanding by participants in the COA’s accrediting process. The COA will:

1. File an annual report with the U.S. Secretary of Education hereafter referred to as Secretary.

2. Submit a list of accredited and candidate (preaccredited) institutions to the Secretary each year.

3. Supply the Secretary with information regarding its member institutions or programs’ compliance with Title IV responsibilities. The COA will notify the Secretary any time it believes that a member institution or program is failing to meet its Title IV responsibilities or is engaged in fraud and abuse related to these responsibilities.

4. Advise the Secretary of any changes in its own policies, procedures, or Standards that might alter the scope of its recognition or affect its compliance with USDE regulations.

5. Ensure that, in any instance where it becomes necessary to make an emergency substitution of a public member on a decision-making body, the replacement will fully satisfy COA requirements for service as a public member and will be capable of completing such service without creating a conflict of interest.

6. Ensure that agency representatives, including consultants, board members, COA members, and administrative staff, will avoid conflicts of interest in fact or appearance by refraining from participating in any decisions affecting the accredited or candidate status of an institution or program where they have had a previous affiliation or served as a consultant.

7. Ensure that institutions or programs failing to meet ABHE standards are required to bring themselves into compliance within required time frames. If programs are less than one year in length, compliance must be achieved within twelve months. Programs of at least one-year’s duration, but less than two years may be permitted eighteen months to achieve compliance. Programs of two-year’s duration or more may be granted two years to achieve compliance. The COA may extend the time available for the achievement of compliance for one additional year beyond the two years of probation for good cause in the case of extraordinary circumstances. Failure of an institution or program to achieve compliance with the standards within the time period specified will result in an adverse action on the part of the COA. In this context, an adverse action is defined to mean
denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or candidate status. “Good cause” factors that may justify an extension of time include a change in leadership, the prospect of a significant positive change in financial position (due to realized or anticipated contributions, the sale of assets, the forgiveness of indebtedness or another positive financial development), the prospect or acquisition of a resource(s) that will enable compliance with the Standard(s) that led to the sanction, and/or the presentation of compelling evidence that a change in circumstances that will produce compliance is imminent.

An institution may be granted no more than three years to achieve compliance (2 years for probation, 1 year of extension for good cause in the case of extraordinary circumstances). Extraordinary circumstances will mean that two-thirds of the COA has determined the institution is more likely than not to achieve full compliance within one year. Not more than 5% of accredited/candidate institutions may be on an extension for good cause at the same time. An institution on probation for two years or show cause cannot be returned to warning.

8. Upon receipt of USDE information that raises questions about an institution or program’s compliance with its responsibilities under the Title IV program, the COA will initiate a written inquiry, within 30 days of notification, seeking responses to the questions. Institutions will be given 30 days to respond. Failure to provide a satisfactory or timely response will result in action to launch a review of the institution or program’s continued compliance with ABHE Standards.

9. Upon receipt of communication from the Secretary that ABHE’s designation of an institution’s branch campuses and/or additional locations diverge from those of the Secretary’s, COA staff will adjust ABHE’s designations to conform with those of the U.S. Department of Education and inform the institution of the change in designation within 10 days. The institution is required to demonstrate compliance with ABHE policies relative to the new designation within 90 days.

10. Monitor institutions and programs throughout their accreditation period to ensure that educational quality is maintained. Enrollment growth will be among the factors monitored. ABHE defines significant enrollment growth as an increase in the headcount enrollment of 50% or more within one institutional fiscal year.

When an institution offering distance education experiences headcount enrollment growth of 50% or more in a single year, the COA staff will inform the U.S. Department of Education of the institution’s rapid growth within 30 days of acquiring such data. Within 45 days of reporting the increase or receiving notice of the increase from the Department, as applicable, COA staff will submit a report to the U.S. Department of Education explaining: (1) how the COA evaluates the capacity of the institutions or programs it accredits to accommodate significant growth in enrollment and to maintain education quality; (2) the specific circumstances regarding the growth at the institution or
program that triggered the review and the results of any evaluation conducted by the COA; and (3) any other information that the COA deems appropriate to demonstrate the effective application of the criteria for recognition or that the Department may require.

Accredited and candidate institutions that experience significant enrollment growth will also be required to submit to the respective COA committee (PRSC – accredited, APCAN – candidate) a report detailing the growth of each program offered by the institution, accompanied by an explanation for the growth of any program that has experienced 50% or more growth in headcount enrollment within one year, and an assessment of educational quality and compliance with ABHE standards for programs that have experienced significant growth. The designated committee will review the report and advise the COA of its findings. The COA will take appropriate action, which may include follow-up reports, a special evaluation team visit (focus visit), or sanction. The public is notified of focus visits and sanctions via the COA website. Upon receipt of substantial, credible evidence from a reliable source of systemic problems that calls into question the ability of the institution or program to continue to meet ABHE Standards, the COA will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that an accredited institution documents acceptable levels of educational quality. Failure of an institution to maintain quality will result in adverse COA action.

11. Require a teach-out plan and/or teach-out agreement as specified in the Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements.

12. If through the annual report, special progress reports, substantive change requests, staff visit reports, or special evaluation visit reports, the COA finds evidence of systematic noncompliance with ABHE policies or significant noncompliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, the COA will take appropriate action against the against the institution and promptly notify the Secretary of Education of the determination of systematic or significant noncompliance.

Policy on Composition of Evaluation Teams

There are two types of evaluation team visits: comprehensive and focused. A comprehensive team visit, including a review of institutional compliance with all standards, is conducted when an institution is considered for candidate status, accredited status, or reaffirmation of accreditation. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) may call for a focused team visit to review compliance with selected standards when an institution is placed on sanction, continued on sanction, or experiences significant changes that raise questions about institutional compliance with specific standards.

Composition of an Evaluation Team

The selection of evaluation team members is based upon competence as documented by professional credentials, experience and expertise in a particular area, and performance on previous evaluation teams or recommendation of a respected reference. There must be no conflict of interest between the evaluator and the institution to be visited as detailed in the Policy on Conflicts of Interest. The team should contain only one person from a given institution and no more than two people from institutions of the same denomination. Evaluation teams will include representation from appropriately qualified administrators and appropriately qualified academicians. ABHE staff members will not be eligible for service as a team evaluator. Current Commissioners are limited to serving on one evaluation team per year and must recuse themselves from any discussion of that institution at COA meetings.

A comprehensive evaluation team for review for candidate status or initial accreditation is normally composed of five members, although larger or smaller teams may be assigned. A comprehensive evaluation team for reaffirmation of accreditation may include fewer evaluators when the institution has not experienced significant changes since the last comprehensive visit or had notable concerns expressed by the COA since the last comprehensive visit. Regardless of the number of evaluators, a comprehensive visit will include a review of all standards; however, a reaffirmation visit may focus on areas of COA concern and include evaluators with specialized expertise in those areas. The composition and size of teams may vary, depending upon the level of education offered and complexity of the institution. In some instances, a smaller on-site evaluation team may be supplemented by additional off-site evaluators with specialized expertise.

A focused visit team is normally composed of two or three members with specialized expertise related to the areas of specific concern.

A minimum of half of the evaluators on a team must be current or recent employees of a COA accredited institution. Other evaluators (public, retired, etc.) may serve on a team provided they have completed the appropriate ABHE Team Evaluator Training within the last three years and have the appropriate professional qualifications.

At least one evaluator on a team to an institution offering programs via distance education will have three years of experience working with students at a distance in a postsecondary institution and have completed the ABHE evaluation team training unit on distance education.
For an evaluation team to an institution offering graduate programs, the academic evaluator and at least one other evaluator on the team must have an earned doctoral degree, three years of experience in a postsecondary institution that offers graduate study, and completion of the ABHE evaluation team training on graduate programs.

A visit for candidate status or initial accreditation will normally include a credentialed librarian as the faculty/library evaluator, where these areas may be evaluated by an academic or faculty evaluator in reaffirmation visits.

ABHE does not participate in joint or coordinated accreditation visits with other accrediting bodies. Concurrent visits are possible, and common documentation may be submitted to both accrediting teams where appropriate; however, the ABHE evaluation team will function as an independent review entity reflecting the same composition and responsibilities of an ABHE evaluation team not engaged in a concurrent visit.

Teams for programmatic accreditation visits will normally have two or three members who meet the qualifications listed above. One of the evaluators must be a practitioner in the field of the education being evaluated. Another must be an educator from an ABHE accredited institution. Team members will be selected with sensitivity to the nature of the programs being evaluated (Refer to Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation).

When developing the evaluator pool and constructing evaluation teams, the COA Executive Director should be sensitive to the need for obtaining representation from diverse perspectives.

**Qualifications of Team Evaluators**

**Administrative Evaluator:** Minimum of three years of experience in program or institutional leadership as a senior administrator (e.g., CEO, executive vice president, chief academic officer, division director, institutional effectiveness/assessment director, or other cabinet-level administrator) in a postsecondary institution or similar nonprofit organization or a graduate degree* in an appropriate academic or professional discipline, plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for an administrative evaluator, distance education, and graduate education.

**Academic Evaluator:** Minimum of three years of experience as an educator engaged in academic leadership (e.g., provost, academic dean, assistant provost/dean, academic division director, program director, registrar) in a postsecondary institution or a graduate degree* in an appropriate academic or professional discipline (doctorate required for evaluation of graduate programs), plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for an academic evaluator, distance education, and graduate education.

**Student Services Evaluator:** Minimum of three years of experience in student development, student life, student support services, or student ministry leadership in a postsecondary institution, an appropriate academic or professional degree, or a qualified student at a COA accredited institution, plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for a
student services evaluator, distance education, and graduate education. A student is considered qualified if he or she meets the professional qualifications associated with this evaluator role (e.g., minimum of three years of experience in student development, student life, or student support services, or student ministry leadership in a postsecondary education).

**Resources Evaluator**: Minimum of three years of experience in resource development or finance in a postsecondary institution or similar nonprofit organization or an appropriate academic or professional degree, plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for a resources evaluator, distance education, and graduate education.

**Library Evaluator**: Minimum of three years of experience in librarianship in a postsecondary institution or a library science degree (e.g., MLS/MLIS), plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for the faculty/library evaluator role, distance education, and graduate education.

**Faculty Evaluator**: Minimum of three years of teaching or research experience in a postsecondary institution or a graduate degree* in an appropriate academic or professional discipline, plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for the faculty/library evaluator role, distance education, and graduate education.

**Assessment Evaluator**: Minimum of three years of experience in assessment of student learning, institutional effectiveness, and/or planning in a postsecondary institution or a graduate degree* in an appropriate academic or professional discipline, plus completion of ABHE evaluation team training, including the units for the administrator and academic evaluator role, distance education, and graduate education.

*Three years of experience and a graduate degree preferred.

**Designation Categories for Evaluators**

**Administrator**: An individual currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in program or institutional administration at the postsecondary level.

**Academic**: An individual currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research (including learning resource and research support, and/or curriculum development).

**Public**: An individual who does not reflect the characteristics of administrator or academic above but has the professional qualifications and experience to serve as an evaluator and has completed the ABHE evaluation team training related to the respective evaluator role.
Selection of the Team Chair

The team chair will be free from potential conflict of interest, have had at least three successful experiences as an evaluator, and completed the ABHE training unit for evaluation team chairs. Normally, the chair will be a senior administrator of a COA accredited institution.

Institution’s Right to Review

The institution to be evaluated has the right to review the names of proposed team members and to request the replacement of any proposed member that it feels would have a bias or conflict of interest in evaluating the institution.

COA Staff Representative

A member of the COA professional staff will normally accompany a comprehensive evaluation team as an observer and procedural guide to review requirements but will not participate in the evaluative judgments of the team. The staff member will also review the evaluation team report for completeness and ensure the submission of the report in the appropriate format.

Representative from the State/Province

A representative from the respective state or province higher education Commission on Accreditation may elect to serve as an observer of the team visit.

Observer

With consent of the COA Executive Director and the institution being evaluated, an observer from another ABHE institution preparing for an evaluation team visit, a sister accrediting agency, or an educational researcher may accompany the team as an observer. The observer will have access to team materials and discussion but will not participate in the evaluation of the institution and is responsible for all travel expenses related to observing the visit (including onsite hotel and meals). Normally not more than one observer may accompany an evaluation team.

Canadian Institutions

Insofar as possible, Canadian institutions should be evaluated by Canadian evaluators.

Evaluation Team Expenses

Within the context of constructing a quality evaluation team, the COA will make every effort to minimize evaluation team travel expenses. The institution being evaluated is responsible for all travel expenses of evaluators and the accompanying COA staff representative. If the state or province requires payment of expenses for an official observer, the institution is responsible for those expenses as well.
Policy on Falsification of Data

As indicated by ABHE Standard 3 and several policies, ABHE institutions have an obligation to provide accurate information regarding their accredited status, their curricular offerings and supporting resources, and their own performance. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) has several means of monitoring institutions to ensure the accuracy of a member or affiliated institution’s public information. Should the COA determine that an institution’s public information is inaccurate, it will take aggressive steps with the institution to correct the misinformation. Should the COA determine that the misinformation is the result of a deliberate attempt to mislead the public or the COA itself, the COA will place the offending institution under an order to show cause why its status with the COA should be continued.

Any allegation that a member institution or program has deliberately falsified data submitted to the COA or any of its representatives is to be submitted in writing to the COA Executive Director according to the guidelines of the Policy on Complaints Against an Institution or Accredited Program. The procedure for processing the allegation is to follow that outlined by the policy on complaints. If the allegation that the member institution or program has deliberately falsified data is confirmed, the institution or program may be placed on warning (monitoring status) or sanctions ranging from probation up to “show cause” why its status should be continued, and the institution will be assessed the full cost of the investigation.

Should the COA discover that an institution having no relationship to the COA is erroneously claiming status with the COA, it will take aggressive action to correct the misleading claims. The COA Executive Director will take appropriate measures to affect a correction, including, if necessary, legal action.

Adopted February 1999; Revised November 2007, November 2011, April 2012
Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV

According to federal regulation 602.16(a)(1)(x), accrediting agencies “must have standards that effectively address the record of compliance with the institution’s program responsibilities under Title IV of the 1998 Higher Education amendments.” The review is to be based on the most recent data provided by the Secretary regarding default rates in the student loan programs, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information provided. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) provides the following guidelines and remedial measures for member institutions:

1. Upon learning of a deficiency in compliance, the COA staff will contact the institution and ask the institution for a response outlining the procedures it is taking to address the problem.

2. Based on the response, the COA may ask the institution for a progress report within one year, dealing with the problem. Should progress be insufficient, the COA will send a site visitor to evaluate the institution or program’s efforts to achieve compliance and to make a report on his conclusions to the COA at its next regular meeting.

3. Should the COA conclude on the basis of the site visitor’s report that the institution’s or program’s efforts are inadequate, a focused team will be sent to the institution to evaluate the institution’s or program’s ongoing compliance with ABHE Standards and to counsel the institution regarding the steps which must be taken toward Title IV compliance.

In addition to the ABHE initiative above, institutions will provide evaluation teams the most recent default rates (and any default reduction plans approved by the Department of Education) and all other documents concerning the institution’s program or responsibilities under Title IV of the act, including any findings of financial audits and program reviews.

Institutions receiving Title IV funds will prepare copies of documents relevant to Title IV compliance for evaluation teams. Teams will study the materials to determine whether the institution’s status with the Department of Education in any way affects its status with ABHE. Should a team discover that an institution or program has failed to meet its Title IV responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse, ABHE has responsibility to provide this information to the Department of Education. Notification to the Secretary of Education includes, but is not limited to, an institution’s systematic noncompliance with the COA’s definition of credit hour standards.

Adopted February 1998; Revised February 2000, April 2012
Policy and Procedures for Appeals

Introduction

In the interest of providing appropriate and fair procedures for appeal of decisions to deny or terminate an accreditation status, issue a show cause order, or place an institution on probation, the Commission on Accreditation (COA) has established the following policies and procedures.

An institution/program has the right to appeal the decisions of the COA and receive an impartial response in a timely fashion. An “appeal is a review of the COA’s decision by a panel of prior Commissioners and/or experienced evaluators who were not involved in the original COA decision. Pending the outcome of an appeal, the institution continues in the accreditation status it had prior to the appeal action.

Actions That May be Appealed

1. Denial or termination of candidate status,
2. Placement on probation,
3. Issuance of an order to show cause why status should be continued, or
4. Denial or termination of accredited status.

Grounds

A request for appeal of a COA decision must be based upon at least one of the following grounds:

That the action of the COA is believed to be

1. Based upon a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the documentation submitted or testimony presented.
2. A failure of the COA to follow its own policies and procedures.
3. A misinterpretation or inconsistent application of ABHE Standards or policies by the COA.
4. Influenced by (a) person(s) with a significant conflict of interest not known prior to the COA action.
5. No longer warranted because new financial Information is available that may influence the decision.

With the exception of finances (see ground #5), an institution may not base requests for appeals on developments that occur following the meeting of the COA in which adverse action is taken. In certain cases, the COA's decision may have been based solely upon the failure of an institution or program to meet a standard or criterion pertaining to finances. In such instances, before a final adverse action is taken, an institution will be permitted an opportunity to provide current financial information where the previously unavailable financial information may
have had a material bearing on the institution’s capacity to comply with the financial standard or criterion. An institution may not, however, file a separate appeal on the grounds that the Appeal Panel failed to give adequate weight to the newly introduced financial information.

**Appeal: Finances**

The institution requesting an appeal will include a non-refundable $500.00 filing fee. The institution will pay the following fees plus any additional expenses incurred by the process.

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<td>Filing fee</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal requiring a face-to-face meeting</td>
<td>$3,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal requiring a focused team visit</td>
<td>$2,500.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The fees are cumulative. If a face-to-face meeting is required, the total is $3,500: the $500 filing fee plus the $3,000 face-to-face meeting fee. If the COA requires a focused team visit as part of resolving the appeal, the fee total will be $6,000 ($500 filing fee + $3,000 face-to-face meeting fee + $2,500 focused visit fee). **The institution will pay the travel and hosting costs for a face-to-face appeal meeting and/or a focused team visit in addition to the fees above.**

**Appeal: Procedures**

1. If an institution elects to appeal the COA’s decision, a written request for reconsideration of the decision must be made by the institution’s chief executive officer or board chair and be postmarked or filed electronically within ten (10) calendar days of the date of the official letter conveying the COA’s action. The written notice of intent must include (1) a request to appeal the COA’s decision (2) indication as to whether the institution desires a virtual or a face-to-face appeal meeting, (3) whether the institution desires to make oral presentation or waives participation in the appeal, (4) the grounds upon which the appeal is being made, and (5) a check for the appropriate fee(s), postmarked within 24 hours of submission of the request for an appeal. Once the request for appeal is received, it cannot be withdrawn.

2. Documentation to support the appeal must be received in the ABHE office within twenty (20) calendar days of the notification of intent to appeal a decision. The affected institution may present mitigating information regarding the evidence upon which the COA’s sanctions were based. With the exception of finances, institutions may not provide new information, but they may clarify information already submitted. Institutions are permitted an opportunity to provide updated financial information at the time of appeal.

3. The COA Executive Director or Director’s representative will confirm receipt of the request and inform the COA Chair of the request within fifteen (15) calendar days of the
receipt of the written request. The Executive Director or Director’s representative will poll members of the appeal panel pool for available dates, allowing thirty (30) days lead time for document submission and review.

4. The COA Executive Director, in cooperation with the COA Chair, will select an Appeal Panel of five (5) persons to consider the appeal, and appoint an Appeal Panel Chair from among the selected members. (See “Appeal Panel” below concerning the pool of potential members of this body.)

5. The Appeal Panel will meet within thirty (30) days (or as quickly thereafter that Appeal Panel scheduling permits) of having received documentation and its charge from the COA Executive Director. This meeting will be virtual unless the institution requests a face-to-face meeting. The COA Executive Director will serve the Appeal Panel in a non-voting, advisory role.

6. The COA Executive Director or Director’s representative will inform all parties concerned of the time, date, and place of the meeting at least thirty (30) days in advance. This communication will be in writing to the institution’s president and board chair. Unless otherwise ordered by the Appeal Panel, a face-to-face appeal will last no more than one day.

7. The appealing institution has the right to appear before the Appeal Panel to present its case. Its appearance can be virtual or, face-to-face meeting, in person at the ABHE Office. The institution has the right to be represented by whomsoever it wishes, including legal counsel. The COA office is to be informed in advance of who will be representing the institution. The Appeal Panel Chair will preside and may limit the testimony of witnesses.

8. The Appeal Panel will consider the grounds for the appeal, the documentation in support of the institution’s allegations, the procedures followed by the COA, the team report(s), the staff visit report(s), and/or the action of the COA. In its consideration of this information, the COA Executive Director will direct the Appeal Panel not to consider any institutional efforts to comply with Standards that were subsequent to the COA’s original action. The Appeal Panel will have the authority necessary to affirm, amend, or remand the COA’s adverse decision with respect to an institution or program. Upon the completion of its deliberations, it will take one of the following actions:
   a. **Affirm** the original adverse action
   b. **Amend** the adverse action only with regard to areas of non-compliance with accreditation Standards or policies,
   c. **Direct** that a focused visit be granted and a report be submitted for consideration by the Appeal Panel, or
   d. **Remand** the adverse action to the Commission for final action. The Appeal Panel must explain the basis for a decision that differs from that of the original decision of the COA with regard to (1) denial or termination of
candidate status, (2) placement on probation, (3) issuance of an order to show cause why status should be continued, or (4) denial or termination of accredited status, and the COA must act in a manner consistent with the Appeal Panel’s decision.

9. The Commission on Accreditation implements all actions resulting from the Appeal Panel process. Final decisions are disseminated as required by the ABHE Policy on Communication of Accreditation Decisions.

Appeal Panel

This special-purpose panel will consist of four persons selected from a pool of qualified personnel from accredited institutions or former Commissioners who are not current members of either the Association’s Board of Directors or the COA and who were not members of the evaluation team that visited the institution in question. The Appeal Panel will include representation from qualified administrators and qualified academicians. In addition to the personnel from accredited institutions, a fifth, public member will be included on the panel who clearly meets the requirements of ABHE’s Policy on Public Representation. To establish an Appeal Panel with sufficient expertise to address the issues being appealed while, at the same time, avoiding conflicts of interest, a pool of ten (10) to twenty (20) potential panelists will be maintained. The COA Executive Director, in cooperation with the COA Chair, will nominate a potential pool of members for appointment by the COA. The COA will review the membership of the pool on an annual basis: adding, deleting, or reappointing members as it sees fit to maintain the level of competence desired.

The qualifications of an Appeal Panel member will include 1) prior experience as a Commissioner or extensive service as a team evaluator, and 2) completion of a specific program of training regarding ABHE Standards, policies, and procedures. Appeal Panelists must also complete the evaluation team training for distance education and graduate education prior to service on an appeal. Administrative representatives must be currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in program or institutional administration at the postsecondary level; academic representatives must be currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research (including learning resource and research support, and/or curriculum development). The public representative must not be affiliated with an ABHE institution as specified in the Policy on Public Representatives. Members of the ABHE staff will not be eligible for service on an Appeal Panel. ABHE will provide regular training regarding its Standards, policies, and procedures through written materials, workshops, seminars, and online educational opportunities.

Conflicts of Interest

A pool of potential Appeal Panel members has been determined to ensure the availability of panel members who are free of conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are described in the ABHE Policy on Conflict of Interest. Persons serving on the Appeal Panel for a given case will
be required to sign the Appeal Panel Member Conflict of Interest Form that will be provided by the ABHE staff at the time of their appointment to consider the appeal of a specific institution or program. In the unlikely event that it is impossible to develop a panel free of bias within the established pool, the COA Executive Director will work with the COA officers to identify additional suitable panelist(s) for the situation under appeal.

Policy on Public Notification of Comprehensive Evaluation Visit

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) accepts written comments from third parties about institutions or programs being evaluated for accreditation or candidate status. The COA publishes annually, through appropriate vehicles, the names of institutions or programs scheduled for evaluations. The COA, further, requires that institutions to be evaluated include on their website public notice that they are to be reviewed for the purpose of determining their status with the COA. Persons wishing to submit third party comments related to the institution may send them through the electronic form at https://abhe.formstack.com/forms/3rd_party_comment, or email coa@abhe.org, or mail ABHE Commission on Accreditation, 5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 130, Orlando, FL 32822. The public should also be notified that there will be opportunity to meet with representatives of the ABHE evaluation team during the actual review of the institution.

Public Statement
To be posted on the institution’s website when hosting an evaluation team relative to its status with the COA

(Institutional name, state) will be hosting a comprehensive accreditation visit by a team of evaluators from the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) (dates) to determine its compliance with the standards for accreditation. During the visit, representatives of the ABHE team will entertain comments from the public. Any members of the public interested in making a presentation regarding the College to the team should contact the College at the following telephone number (phone number) or email address (email address) to determine a meeting time. Persons wishing to submit third party comments related to the institution may send them through the electronic form at https://abhe.formstack.com/forms/3rd_party_comment, or email coa@abhe.org, or mail ABHE Commission on Accreditation, 5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 130, Orlando, FL 32822. Persons interested in reviewing the standards for accreditation will find them on the ABHE website at abhe.org. They appear under Accreditation/Accreditation Documents/COA Manual. The institution is subject to the Institutional Accreditation Standards.

Adopted February 1997; Revised November 2011, April 2012, February 2022
Policy on the Commission on Accreditation
Nominating Committee

To assure proper balance and representative membership on the COA, the following procedures will be used by the Nominating Committee.

Designation Categories for Commissioners

The COA will include representation from three categories of individuals: administrators, academics, and public representatives. Representatives of accredited member institutions will constitute no less than 3/4 of total Commissioners. Public members will represent at least 1/7 of the COA.

**Administrator:** An individual currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in program or institutional administration at the postsecondary level.

**Academic:** An individual currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research (including learning resource and research support, and/or curriculum development).

**Public Representative:** An individual who is not (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, shareholder of, or consultant to, an ABHE accredited, candidate or applicant institution; (2) a member of any trade association or membership organization affiliated or associated with the COA; or (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of a person in category (1) or (2) above. A student at a COA accredited institution is also considered a public representative.

Training

All elected and appointed COA members must complete the COA new commissioner orientation and the evaluation team training units on distance education and graduate education prior to service.

Procedures

1. **Nominating Committee.** The Nominating Committee will be composed of the officers of the COA (i.e., chair, vice chair, and secretary). To assure proper balance and representative membership on the COA, the following procedures will be used by the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee will develop a list of eligible candidates to be nominated for future vacancies on the COA using the following guidelines.

2. **Elected offices.** Eligible candidates to be nominated for election to the COA are administrators and faculty members of accredited member institutions or programs. Administrative representatives must be currently or recently engaged in a significant
manner in program or institutional administration at the postsecondary level; academic representatives must be currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research (including learning resource and research support, and/or curriculum development). The Nominating Committee will survey the ABHE staff and chief executive officers of member schools for candidates to fill future vacancies. The Nominating Committee will be appointed by the COA and will submit to the annual Delegate Assembly a slate of two or more names for each COA-elected position (excluding public members who are appointed by the COA). In cases where an incumbent is eligible to serve an additional term, the Nominating Committee may choose to nominate only the incumbent. If an incumbent has been appointed to fill an unexpired term, the Nominating Committee will provide a slate of two or more names.

3. In selecting nominees to present before the COA Delegate Assembly for a vote, the Nominating Committee will consider the following:

   a. The composition of COA:
      (1) Denominational balance and representation,
      (2) Geographical balance and representation,
      (3) Representation of institutions or programs based on size, level of education offered, and type of accreditation held,
      (4) Representation from Canadian institutions or programs,
      (5) Representation of women and minorities, and
      (6) Representation of both administrators and academicians.

   b. The credentials of candidates:
      (1) Documentation of competence in terms of education and expertise.
      (2) Past service and activity in association affairs (e.g., COA service, annual meeting participation, evaluation team participation, consultative activity, contribution to ABHE publications).
      (3) Years of service in ABHE-accredited member institutions or programs.
      (4) Contribution to institutions or programs of biblical higher education.

4. Vacancies. Commissioners serving three years of an unexpired term will be deemed to have served a full term. If a Commissioner is unable to serve a full term as assigned, the COA will appoint a substitute as follows.

   a. In the case of a permanent vacancy identified prior to the publication of the agenda for the next COA meeting, a runner up from the last election will be selected by the COA Nominating Committee to finish out the term for the position that has been vacated. To retain the balance of the Commission’s membership, the runner up that most closely matches the characteristics of the vacating COA member will be chosen to fill the vacancy. If a runner up from the last election is not available to serve, the Nominating Committee may nominate a qualified alternate to finish out the remaining term. Appointment must be ratified by the COA.
b. On the occasion of a temporary vacancy where a health or other emergency has rendered a person unable to serve, the COA Executive Director, in concert with the COA Chair, will seek to fill any vacancies from among the ranks of former Commissioners who are known to have the expertise needed for the position that will be open during the forthcoming meeting. Following the meeting, the Commissioner who was unable to serve for the occasion will resume COA duties. At the outset of a meeting where a former Commissioner has been temporarily assigned to serve in place of a sitting Commissioner, the COA will take formal action to officially appoint the individual to the open position for the duration of the COA meeting and any follow up activities directly related to the meeting.

5. Appointed representatives

a. Public representatives. The Nominating Committee will appoint public representatives in accord with the Policy on Public Representatives.

   Student representative. The Nominating Committee will customarily appoint a student from a COA accredited institution to serve as a public representative.

Adopted February 2010; Revised April 2012, June 2016, July 2020, February 2021
Policy on Public Representatives

One of ABHE’s major purposes is to assure the public that its institutions and programs are educationally effective. To realize this purpose, ABHE includes public representatives on both the Board of Directors and the Commission on Accreditation (COA).

Relationship to the COA

Public representatives are related to the COA as follows:

1. They are appointed to their office by the relevant decision-making body upon the recommendation of the professional staff.

2. Non-student public representatives are appointed to their office for one four-year term and may succeed themselves for a second term after which they may not be re-appointed for four years.

3. Nominations for student public representatives will be solicited from the ABHE membership via a call for nominations when there is a vacancy. Student public representatives may be appointed to a two-year term, which may be repeated for a second two-year term at the discretion of the COA Officers. Student public representatives may serve one year beyond graduation from a COA-accredited institution. Student public representatives that enroll in a second program at a COA-accredited institution may serve on the COA up to two 2-year terms. The student public representatives are considered to be full participating members of the COA with all the rights and responsibilities of a public representative.

4. They can terminate their appointment by written resignation to the COA officers.

5. Their appointment can be terminated by the unanimous vote of the COA officers.

6. They will serve as voting members of the COA.

7. They have the right to enter comments into the official minutes of the COA.

8. They will constitute at least one seventh (1/7) and not more than one fourth (1/4) of the COA membership.

9. Should the decision-making body receive a complaint about a public representative currently serving, the complaint will be reviewed by the officers of the decision-making body within 30 days of receipt.
Qualifications

Public representatives will have the following qualifications:

1. They will not be related to an ABHE applicant, candidate, or accredited institution or program by employment or board membership.
2. They will not serve as a consultant to an ABHE applicant, candidate, or accredited institution or program.
3. They will not be a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the COA.
4. They will not be a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraphs one through three above.
5. They will be sympathetic to biblical higher education and its philosophy of education.
6. They will be individuals who are known for their integrity, common sense, and professional accomplishments.
7. They will be individuals who have an awareness of needs and interests of the public as related to higher education.
8. Student public representatives should usually be a graduate student and endorsed by a faculty member or administrator at their institution.

Public representatives will have the following duties:

1. They will acquaint themselves with the purposes of biblical higher education.
2. They will acquaint themselves with ABHE Standards for Accreditation.
3. They will acquaint themselves with ABHE procedures for accreditation.
4. They will complete the required online evaluator training and the COA orientation training.
5. They will familiarize themselves with materials made available to them prior to a meeting of the decision-making body to which they are appointed.
6. They will attend a major portion of all meetings of the decision-making body.
7. They will seek to ensure that the decision-making body follows established ABHE policies and procedures.

8. They will alert the decision-making body to issues they perceive to be pertinent to the public interests and that relate to the issue requiring a decision.

9. They will honor ABHE’s policies concerning the confidentiality of materials. Within these constraints, they will have the privilege of reporting to the public such items and through such media as they deem desirable.

Policy on Communication of Accreditation Decisions and Negative Actions

In keeping with its responsibility as a recognized accrediting body, the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) seeks to provide timely information to appropriate agencies and the public regarding its final accrediting decisions. Accordingly, it has established the following procedures:

1. **Notification by ABHE to interested parties.** Within 30 days of a final action to (1) grant or reaffirm an institution’s or program’s accreditation or candidate status, (2) place an institution or program on warning or probation, (3) issue a show cause order to an institution or program, or (4) implement an adverse action (denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of candidate or accredited status), the COA will provide electronic written notification of its decision to the institution, the United States Department of Education, state and provincial postsecondary education offices recognized accrediting agencies, and the public. Notification to federal, state, provincial, and accrediting agencies will be at the same time as it is made to the institution. Notice to the public will be via the association website within 24 hours of notice to the institution or program. Notification of a final action of warning, probation, show cause, or adverse action will include publication of the contents of the action letter, including the reason(s) for the action.

2. **Responsibility of ABHE to report rationale and institutional comments for adverse actions.** Within 60 days after a final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate candidate or accredited status, the COA will make available to (1) the U.S. Department of Education, (2) state and provincial postsecondary education offices, (3) recognized accrediting agencies, and (4) the public, a summary of the reasons for any adverse action regarding an institution or program and any official comments that the institution may wish to make in response to the decision. If no comments are offered, ABHE will document that the institution was provided opportunity to make comments.

3. **Responsibility of ABHE to report voluntary withdrawals or lapses in accreditation or candidate status.** Within 10 business days after receiving notification from the institution, the COA will provide notification of voluntary withdrawal of accredited or candidate status to (1) the U.S. Department of Education, (2) state and provincial postsecondary education offices, (3) recognized accrediting agencies, and (4) the public. Should an institution allow its accreditation or candidate status to lapse, the COA will, within 10 business days of the effective date, provide notification of termination of accreditation or candidate status to the four entities named above. Notification to the public will be via the association website.

4. **Responsibility of institutions to report actions of related agencies.** Institutions or programs seeking or holding candidate or accredited status with the COA are to advise the COA within 30 days of receipt of notice of any final action taken by another
recognized accrediting body or governmental agency to deny, suspend, or revoke any candidate or accreditation status. Notification will include a copy of the rationale given to the institution by the other agency for its decision. Failure to notify the COA within 30 days of the final action by the other body will require issuance of a show cause order as to why status with ABHE should be continued.

Should an institution or program holding ABHE accreditation or candidate status receive a negative action on the part of another recognized accrediting body with which it has had standing, the COA will, within 30 days of receipt of notification by the other agency or the institution, initiate a review of the institution’s or program’s candidate or accreditation status to determine if it continues to comply satisfactorily with the COA’s accreditation Standards. The review will consist of a one-day staff visit and a written staff report to the appropriate COA committee at the next scheduled meeting. The COA may subsequently require follow-up reporting or a focused team visit.

The COA will not reaffirm the accreditation or candidate status of an institution or program during the period that it is the subject of an interim action by another recognized institutional or programmatic accrediting body or state agency that could lead to loss of its status with the agency or loss of authorization to provide postsecondary education. The COA will also not grant initial accreditation or candidate status to an institution or program during the period that it is the subject of an interim action by another recognized institutional or programmatic accrediting body that could lead to loss of its accreditation status with the other agency, or an interim action by a state or provincial agency that could lead to loss of legal authorization to provide postsecondary education in its home state or province. Grounds for withholding initial or reaffirmation of accreditation or candidate status include the following:

a. A pending or final action brought by a state or provincial agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s legal authority to provide postsecondary education in its home state or province;

b. A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or preaccreditation;

c. A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s accreditation or preaccreditation; or

d. Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.

Should the COA, upon completion of adverse action by another agency or state, make a decision different from that of the other body, it will, within 30 days of its action, provide the USDE Secretary and other affected bodies a rationale for its decision, to include an explanation why the issue(s) that caused adverse action by the other accreditor was not sufficiently compelling to prevent the COA from coming to a different decision.

Following each regular meeting, the COA provides written information regarding its final decisions relating to an institution’s or program’s accreditation/candidate status to the
U.S. Department of Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, all recognized institutional accrediting bodies, and all states or provinces. It is sometimes the case that the COA will make a final decision regarding an institution or program outside of its regular meeting cycle. In such cases, the COA routinely provides written information regarding its final decision to the U.S. Department of Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, recognized accrediting bodies, and state or provincial postsecondary education offices. The COA will share information regarding its decisions related to an institution’s or program’s accreditation or candidate status, whether positive or negative, with other recognized accrediting bodies and state/provincial approval agencies upon request.

5. **Responsibility of institutions to notify students and the public of negative accreditation decisions.** Within 7 days after receiving notification from the COA of a decision to place the institution on warning or probation, show cause why the institution’s accreditation should be continued, or denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of candidate or accredited status, the institution will publish notice of the action as stated below to its website.

**Notification concerning warning:**

“The ABHE Commission on Accreditation has placed [institution’s name] on warning for weaknesses in satisfying the following accreditation standard(s).

[Statement of Standards and weaknesses as noted in the COA action letter]

“The institution retains [accredited / candidate] status with ABHE during this period of warning and will be subject to periodic monitoring, which may include progress reports and/or focused visits by Commission on Accreditation staff or evaluation teams. If weaknesses are not resolved within the time specified (usually one year), the Commission on Accreditation may (1) extend the warning for a second year, (2) place the institution on probation, (3) order the institution to show cause why its [accreditation / candidate status] should be continued, or (4) withdraw [accreditation / candidate status]. Warning is rarely extended beyond two years.”

**Notification concerning probation:**

“The ABHE Commission on Accreditation has placed [institution’s name] on probation for failure to comply with the following accreditation standard(s).

[Statement of Standards and weaknesses as noted in the COA action letter]

“The institution retains [accredited / candidate] status with ABHE during this period of probation and will be subject to periodic monitoring, which may include progress reports and/or focused visits by Commission on Accreditation staff or evaluation teams. Should the institution fail to correct the identified deficiencies within two years, the Commission on Accreditation must take adverse action against the institution and remove its
Where there is sufficient progress, the Commission on Accreditation may grant a one-year extension of [accreditation / candidate status] for “good cause” to allow the institution to demonstrate substantial compliance with the Standards for Accreditation.

Notification concerning show cause:

“The ABHE Commission on Accreditation has issued [institutional name] an order to show cause why its [accreditation/candidate status] should be continued. An institution retains its [accreditation or candidate status] with the Commission on Accreditation while under show cause order. The maximum time permitted for a show cause order is one year. Failure to comply with the following specific accreditation standard(s) by the deadline imposed by the Commission on Accreditation will result in removal of the institution’s status with the Commission on Accreditation.”

[Statement of Standards and deficiencies as noted in the COA action letter]

When an institution is issued a show cause order, it must inform its students and the public of the COA’s final decision.

Public Actions Regarding Accredited and Candidate Status

Grant Accredited Status

Granting accredited status is an affirming, public action based on the COA’s judgment that the institution or program substantially complies with all ABHE’s Standards, including documentation of the appropriateness, rigor, and achievement of the institution’s stated student learning outcomes. For institutional accreditation, the grant of accredited status also indicates the COA’s judgment that the institution substantially complies with all Title IV eligibility requirements. The initial grant of accreditation is for up to five years with a subsequent comprehensive review; subsequent reaffirmation of accreditation is for up to ten years.

Grant Candidate Status

Granting candidate status is an affirming, public action based on the COA’s judgment that the institution is making satisfactory progress toward accreditation and shows promise of achieving accreditation within a maximum of five years.

Reaffirm Accredited Status

Reaffirmation of accreditation is an affirming, public action indicating an extended renewal of accreditation status for an institution currently holding ABHE accreditation. Reaffirmation is based on the COA’s judgment that the institution or program substantially complies with all
ABHE’s Standards, including documentation of the appropriateness, rigor, and achievement of the institution’s stated student learning outcomes. For institutional accreditation, reaffirmation also indicates the COA’s judgment that the institution substantially complies with all Title IV eligibility requirements. Reaffirmation is granted for an extended period of time (up to ten years) as designated by the COA.

**Continue Accreditation**

Continue accreditation is a neutral, public action for an institution that was reviewed for reaffirmation but did not have reaffirmation granted for the customary extended period of time. Instead, the institution’s accreditation was continued for a shorter period of time (usually one year) due to interim or temporary circumstances that warrant a subsequent appearance before the COA. Continued accreditation may be linked to a negative action as noted below. Reasons for continued accreditation include the following:

a. The institution is subject to an interim negative action by another recognized accrediting agency. ABHE will not reaffirm the accreditation of an institution until a negative action by another recognized accrediting agency has been resolved. During the period of interim action by another agency, the institution’s ABHE accreditation remains intact, and the institution is not considered to be under negative action by the COA.

b. The COA has asked the institution for a follow-up report before making a decision on reaffirmation. In such circumstances, accreditation may be continued for up to two years, if deemed necessary by the COA.

c. The COA has placed the institution on warning, probation, or show cause. ABHE will not reaffirm the accreditation of an institution until negative action by the COA has been resolved. During the period of warning, probation, or show cause, the institution’s accreditation remains intact.

d. The institution has been removed from warning, probation, or show cause, and has been found by the COA to be in substantial compliance with ABHE Standards but is subject to a monitoring report to verify that reaffirmation of accreditation is warranted before action is taken to reaffirm the institution’s accreditation. In such circumstances, accreditation may be continued for up to two years, if deemed necessary by the COA.

**Warning**

Warning is a negative, public action indicating that the COA has determined that an institution is in substantial compliance with ABHE standards, but meets one or more standards with sufficient weakness that, if the current trend is not altered, the institution is in jeopardy of being found out of compliance with a standard in the near future and placed on probation. The institution retains accredited or candidate status with ABHE during a period of warning, and will be subject to periodic monitoring, which may include progress reports and/or focused visits by COA staff or evaluation teams. If weaknesses are not resolved within the time specified (usually one year), the COA may (1) extend the warning for a second year, (2) place the institution on probation, (3) order the institution to show cause why its accreditation or candidate status should be continued, or (4) withdraw accreditation or candidate status. Warning is rarely extended beyond
two years. Rather, an institution that fails to strengthen specified weaknesses by a stated COA deadline is placed on probation.

Warning is not an appealable action.

**Probation**

Probation is a negative, public action indicating that the COA has determined that the institution no longer complies with one or more of the Standards for Accreditation. The institution retains accredited or candidate status with ABHE during a period of probation, and will be subject to periodic monitoring, which may include progress reports and/or focused visits by COA staff or evaluation teams. Should the institution fail to correct the identified deficiencies within two years, the COA must take adverse action against the institution and remove its accreditation or candidate status. Where there is sufficient progress, the COA may grant a one-year extension of accreditation or candidate status for “good cause” to allow the institution to demonstrate substantial compliance with the Standards for Accreditation. An institution on probation and/or show cause for two years cannot be returned to warning.

A teach-out plan, approved by the COA Substantive Change Officer or the appropriate COA committee, is required for institutions placed on probation. The institution will be required to submit a teach-out plan in accord with specifications in the Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements within 60 days of the notice informing it of the probationary status. If the institution already has an approved teach-out plan on file, a new plan is not required unless changes are necessary.

Placement on probation may be appealed in accordance with the ABHE Policy on Reviews and Appeals. Notification of an appealable action will not be released until appeal options have been exhausted and the action is final.

**Show Cause**

A show cause order is a negative, public action indicating that an institution’s accredited or candidate status will be withdrawn unless it can provide persuasive evidence that such action should not be taken. The time allowed to provide this persuasive evidence is not to exceed one year. A teach-out plan, approved by the COA Substantive Change Officer or the appropriate COA committee, is required for institutions placed on show cause. The institution will be required to submit a teach-out plan in accord with specifications in the Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements within 60 days of the notice informing it of the show cause order. If the institution already has an approved teach-out plan on file, a new plan is not required unless changes are necessary.

In cases where an institution has been on probation for two years, but has failed to correct its deficiencies, a show cause order can only be issued for good cause. In the absence of good cause, the COA is required by federal regulations to remove an institution’s status with the
COA. The rationale for good cause must be substantive and defensible. A show cause order may be appealed in accordance with the ABHE Policy on Reviews and Appeals. Notification of an appealable action will not be released until appeal options have been exhausted and the action is final.

**Termination of Accredited/Candidate Status**

Termination of Accredited or Candidate Status is a negative, public action indicating that an institution’s or program’s accredited or candidate status has been withdrawn.

Termination of accredited or candidate status may be appealed in accordance with the ABHE Policy on Reviews and Appeals. Notification of an appealable action will not be released until appeal options have been exhausted and the action is final.

**Denial of Initial Accreditation/Candidate Status**

Denial of initial accreditation or candidate status is a negative, public action indicating that a candidate institution or program seeking accreditation has been denied accreditation status or an applicant institution or program has been denied candidate status. Denial of initial accreditation is most often the result of a candidate institution not achieving substantial compliance with the ABHE Standards for Accreditation within the maximum five years from the granting of candidate status and the maximum deadline for achieving initial accreditation. Denial of candidate status is most often the result of an applicant institution not achieving substantial progress toward accreditation within the maximum five years from the granting of applicant status and the maximum deadline for achieving candidate status.

Denial of initial accreditation or candidate status may be appealed in accordance with the ABHE Policy on Reviews and Appeals. Notification of an appealable action will not be released until appeal options have been exhausted and the action is final.

The COA’s negative actions may be imposed in an incremental fashion. This does not mean, however, that the COA may not immediately impose a sanction of probation or show cause where the severity of circumstances warrants. Likewise, the COA may take immediate action to withdraw accreditation, candidate status, or applicant status without prior sanction where the severity of circumstances warrants.

**Appeals**

In the interest of fairness and effective communication, the COA’s appeal process provides a 10-day interval to file a written intention to appeal following written notification of a decision to impose a sanction, and an additional 20-day interval to document the appeal in accordance with the procedures outlined in the ABHE Policy and Procedures on Appeals. The COA Executive Director will not notify the public of the imposition of a sanction until a decision is final. In the event of an appeal, the decision is not final until all steps of the appeals process have been
completed. Once a decision is final, the COA Executive Director will immediately inform the institution and other affected entities, including the public, of the decision as required by law and by COA policy.

Policy on Reinstatement  
(Institutional Accreditation Only)

Termination or voluntary withdrawal from applicant, candidate, or accredited status; or denial of candidate status, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation results in the severance of an institution’s formal relationship to the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) for a period of a minimum of one year. The one-year period begins after all appeals, if pursued, have been exhausted. After the one-year period, an institution may reapply for status with the COA by the following means. If an institution does not request reinstatement within three years of the removal of status, it must reapply as though it never had a relationship with the COA.

A. One year after applicant status was terminated or voluntarily withdrawn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for</th>
<th>The institution must</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reinstatement of applicant status with a new maximum five-year timeline for achieving candidate status</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request and a report documenting compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reinstatement of applicant status and authorization of an evaluation team visit for consideration of candidate status</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request and a new self-study (compliance document, assessment plan, planning document, statistical abstract, documentation exhibits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. One year after candidate status was terminated or voluntarily withdrawn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request for</th>
<th>The institution must</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reinstatement of applicant status with a new maximum five-year timeline for achieving candidate status</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request and a report documenting compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reinstatement of candidate status with adherence to the original maximum five-year timeline for achieving accredited status (only possible if two of the original five years for achievement of candidate status remains available)</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request, a report documenting compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility, and a progress report evidencing satisfactory progress toward achieving accredited status within five years of the original date candidate status was granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reinstatement of applicant status and authorization of an evaluation team visit for consideration of candidate status</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request and a new self-study (compliance document, planning document, assessment plan, statistical abstract, documentation exhibits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Reinstatement of applicant status and authorization of an evaluation team visit for consideration of accredited status

Submit an official letter of request and a new self-study (compliance document, planning document, assessment plan, statistical abstract, documentation exhibits)

C. One year after accredited status was terminated or voluntarily withdrawn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reinstatement of applicant status and authorization of an evaluation team visit for consideration of accredited status</td>
<td>Submit an official letter of request and a new self-study (compliance document, planning document, assessment plan, statistical abstract, documentation exhibits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reinstatement to candidate or accredited status cannot be achieved until the institution has submitted a new self-study, hosted a comprehensive evaluation team visit, and received a favorable decision from the COA.

An institution terminated or withdrawn from candidate or accredited status may elect to submit a request for reinstatement with an evaluation team visit for “either candidate or accredited status.” In such cases, the status appropriate will be determined by the COA after review of the evaluation team report and interview of institutional representatives at the February COA meeting. An institution seeking “either candidate or accredited status” and granted candidate status has not been denied accredited status, and therefore, cannot appeal the COA decision.

Revised October 1988, April 2012, June 2014, November 2018
Policy on Conflicts of Interest

Introduction

Integrity is the foundation upon which any effective accreditation process must depend. It is therefore essential that any individual who participates in the accreditation process be free of conflicts of interest (or even the appearance of a conflict of interest) where circumstances or relationships might call into question a person’s capacity to make impartial judgments regarding an institution’s or program’s compliance with accreditation requirements. The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) follows multiple practices to ensure that its processes will be free of conflicts of interest. Although the COA has attempted to identify and articulate the types of conflicts that may most commonly arise in its accreditation process, the COA must also depend upon the participants in the process to police themselves and call attention to potential conflicts of interest, should any questionable matters arise.

Obvious Conflicts of Interest

The COA recognizes the following considerations as conflicts:

- Current service at an institution with the same denominational/fellowship affiliation
- Current service at an institution with the same geographical base of constituency
- Previous employment as faculty or staff within past ten years
- Previous service as a board member within the past ten years
- Previous service as a team evaluator within the past five years
- Previous service as a reader (primary or secondary) for a meeting of the full COA within a two-year period
- Acceptance of substantive gifts or honoraria for self or spouse apart from scheduled fees during the accreditation process, including any appeals processes
- Previous attendance at or graduation from an institution being considered
- Submission of an application for employment to an institution within the past five years
- Any situation that could affect an individual’s ability to be impartial

Although it is nearly impossible to develop a comprehensive list, the test of a conflict is whether it could compromise an individual’s capacity to make an impartial decision.

Independent Consulting

In addition to the obvious conflicts noted above, independent consulting by Commission members can lead to real or perceived conflicts of interest.

An independent consultant is defined as a non-employee, holding an established reputation in the field of higher education, who offers paid, irregular, ad hoc services to an institution and has no direct or indirect substantial interest in the institution with which he or she is contracted. This
is not an issue of how the individual is paid (e.g., contract or part-time staff). If the individual is brought on for the purpose of helping the institution achieve accreditation, then they are functionally an independent contractor. For potential conflicts related to other contracted employment relationships, such as adjunct teaching, see the Obvious Conflicts of Interest section above.

To avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest in the accreditation process, all persons subject to the Conflicts of Interest Policy must also adhere to the following:

- May not serve as a team evaluator for any institution for which the individual served as an independent consultant in the previous five years
- May not serve as a Commission reader for any institution for which the individual served as an independent consultant in the previous five years
- May not serve as an independent consultant to ABHE institutions while serving on the ABHE Commission on Accreditation.

All persons subject to the Conflicts of Interest Policy will disclose to the ABHE Commission on Accreditation on an annual basis all consulting activities related to member institutions or related to accreditation and will agree to inform any institution or other entity with which the individual is developing a consulting relationship that he or she is acting in a personal capacity and is not representing the ABHE Commission on Accreditation.

**Persons Subject to the Conflicts of Interest Policy**

The COA recognizes that that following types of persons serving ABHE’s processes may encounter potential conflicts of interest:

- COA members, especially those assigned as readers
- ABHE evaluation members
- ABHE board members
- ABHE staff members
- ABHE-assigned adjunct Commission Staff Representatives (CSRs)
- ABHE appeals panel members
- Persons having an interest in any litigation that may involve the COA, the Association, or an institution involved in ABHE’s accreditation process

Although the COA staff will do its best to make team and reader assignments that are free of conflicts of interest, COA members will sign a form affirming that they are unaware of any conflicts that will affect their ability to make an impartial decision regarding the status of the institutions they are assigned to review. Commissioners will further agree to recuse themselves from consideration of any institution where they are aware of a potential conflict of interest. Recusal means that the Commissioner will declare a recusal before discussion begins, leave the table, and avoid participating in any discussion related to the institution or the decision that the COA makes relative to the institution under consideration. Persons assigned to ABHE accreditation teams will sign a form certifying that they are free of conflicts of interest with respect to the institution they are to evaluate. Concurrently, institutions will be permitted to
object to potential evaluators who they believe may have a conflict of interest. Appeal panel members will sign a form confirming that they are unaware of any conflicts of interest that may affect their ability to make an impartial decision. Should the COA chair determine that a conflict of interest has occurred that has not been recognized, the chair will assume responsibility to take whatever action is necessary to mitigate the effects of the conflict. In the case of an egregious action by a Commissioner that creates a conflict of interest, the COA Officers will have authority to terminate a Commissioner’s status as a member of the COA.

Adopted April 2012; Revised June 2014, June 2022
Policy on Review of Standards

Introduction

For many years now, the USDE regulations for recognizing accrediting bodies has required agencies to maintain a systematic program of review of their accrediting standards. The purpose of this review has been to ensure that standards are valid and reliable indicators of educational quality and relevant to the needs of students. Regulations written for the implementation of the 1998 Higher Education Amendments eliminated the use of the terms “validity” and “reliability” as found in previous versions of the regulations because of the technical meanings of these terms in the field of statistics. Nevertheless, accrediting agencies are expected to maintain an ongoing or cyclical review of their standards. In light of this expectation the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) will:

1. Maintain a process that will result in a review of at least one major standard per year during its regular meeting. Consideration of standards will be rotated so that over a 10-year period all standards will be reviewed.

2. Maintain forms and procedures that will encourage team evaluators to comment on existing standards regarding any difficulties experienced in applying them in the field. Team members will be instructed to rate standards regarding both their importance and their clarity. They will be encouraged to offer revisions to existing standards, suggest new standards, or recommend deletion of existing standards based upon their experience in the field. The COA Committee on Criteria will review all comments and recommendations from team members.

3. At 10-year intervals, the COA will initiate a comprehensive review of standards. It is anticipated that, at the conclusion of such a review, the standards may be completely recast to ensure that they reflect quality educational expectations according to current practices in the fields of instruction offered by accredited institutions or programs.

4. Upon receipt of evidence that a standard no longer assures the quality of education in a manner that meets the needs of students, ABHE will, within 12 months, initiate action to change the standard. The procedure will be consistent with the COA’s Policy on Changes to the COA’s Policies, Procedures, and Standards.

5. When proposing a revision to standards, an effort will be made to afford all relevant constituencies (e.g., member institutions, states, provinces, other recognized accrediting bodies, and the public) a meaningful opportunity to provide input into the review and revision process. One of the important constituencies that will have opportunity for input into the revision process will be the students of accredited member institutions or programs. They will be especially encouraged to comment on the relevance of a proposed standard to their specific needs.
6. It will be the goal of the COA to maintain standards that are of sufficient clarity to ensure similar decisions where similar conditions exist. In other words, the standards should enable the COA to be consistent in its decision-making processes.

Adopted February 2000; Revised July 2020
Policy on the Spirit of Accreditation

Because one of the principal values of accreditation is the stimulus and growth that institutions or programs experience in the accreditation process, the spirit of accreditation should be one of constructive evaluation and helpfulness. Accordingly, evaluators are not to be looked upon as inspectors checking on conformity to arbitrary standards.

Accreditation of an institution or program is based upon the Principle for Accreditation. Hence, strict conformity in every detail is not required. Excellence in major areas may well compensate for minor deficiencies. Then, too, the final test of an institution’s or program’s strength is whether it is achieving its objectives in preparing students for effective Christian living and service.

In cases where the Standards do not seem fully applicable by reason of cultural or ethnic distinctives, the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) practices flexibility in the application of Standards, giving more emphasis to positive educational outcomes.

The validity and reliability of the Standards are under constant examination. Their major purpose is to stimulate self-evaluation. The Standards are structured to focus upon desirable qualities rather than minimal quantitative requirements. They include all significant phases of institutional and programmatic and educational excellence.

It is not the desire of the COA to insist on stultifying uniformity through the application of these Standards. Rather, it encourages individuality within the framework of biblical higher education. When evaluating an institution or program, the COA looks for creativity, educational vision, and sound planning.

It is the purpose of the COA to administer these Standards with utmost impartiality and objectivity.

Adopted October 1990
Policy on Substantive Change

Changes Requiring a Proposal and Commission on Accreditation (COA) or Substantive Change Officer Approval before Implementation

1. Change in Mission or Objectives
   a. Any substantial change in the established mission or objectives of the institution or its programs.

2. Change in Scope
   a. Addition of graduate/post-graduate degrees, certificates, or diplomas by an institution that previously offered only undergraduate degrees or certificates.
   b. Addition of doctoral degrees, certificates, or diplomas by an institution that previously offered only master’s degrees or graduate certificates.
   c. Addition of programs that represent a significant departure from existing programs offered at the time of the last comprehensive review. A significant departure is defined as either a new educational program (major or concentration) of 24 semester hours/36 quarter hours or more or a credential (degree, certificate, or diploma) that requires 50% of semester hours in a discipline not reflected in previously approved programs or credentials. Required coursework in an already approved program offered over the past three years is not considered part of the 50% of semester hours in a new discipline for the purpose of determining significant departure.
   d. Introduction of an alternative Bible/Theology Studies requirement where 50% or more of the requirement is met through means other than Biblical Studies and/or Theological Studies courses.¹
   e. Entering into a written arrangement under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers more than 25% but less than 50% of one or more of the accredited institution’s degrees, certificates, or diplomas. (The institution issuing the credential must offer 50% or more of the degree or certificate.) This does not apply to transfer articulation agreements.
   f. Initiation of an adult degree completion program.³
   g. A change in the way an institution measures student progress, including whether the institution measures progress in clock hours or credit hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters, or uses time-based or non-time-based methods.
   h. A substantial increase in the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of a program.
   i. Acquisition of another institution, or program or location of another institution.⁴
   j. Addition of a permanent location at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.²,⁴
   k. Participation in the federal Prison Education Program (PEP) providing Pell Grant access to confined on incarcerated students.⁵
3. Change in Control

a. Initiation/discontinuation of a formal relationship with a denomination or fellowship.
b. Change in ownership resulting in a change of control. Changes that constitute a “change of ownership resulting in a change of control” include, but are not limited to, merger, acquisition, change in legal status, or change in governance (requires a site visit within 6 months of implementation).

4. Change in Geographical Location

a. Relocation of the main campus (requires a site visit within 6 months of implementation).  
b. Initiation or relocation of an additional location where 50% or more of a degree, certificate, or diploma may be earned by classroom courses, hybrid courses, or a combination of both (requires a site visit within 6 months of implementation).  
c. Initiation of an educational site at a Federal, State, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other similar correctional institution (requires a site visit within 6 months of implementation).  
d. Addition of the first credential where a student may complete 50% or more at a Federal, State, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other correctional institution if not reviewed when site was initiated.  
e. Initiation or relocation of a branch campus (requires a site visit within 6 months of implementation).  
f. Discontinuation of a branch campus or an additional location where 100% of a degree, certificate, or diploma may be earned (requires submission of a teach-out plan for affected students).  
g. Initiation of a pre-approval waiver for additional locations beyond three, which may be submitted along with the substantive change proposal for a third additional location. See the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus for additional requirements.

5. Change in Modality/Delivery Method

1See the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus
2See the Policy on Instructional Modalities
3See the Policy on Teach-Out Plans
4See the Policy and Procedures for Federal Prison Education Programs (PEPs)
a. Addition of the first credential where a student may complete 50% or more via a delivery method not in use (at the 50% level) at the time of the last comprehensive review. Applicable to distance education, correspondence education, mixed modality, and competency-based education by the course/credit approach.¹ ²
b. Addition of each competency-based education program where 50% or more is completed by direct assessment.²
c. Addition of the first credential where a student may complete 50% or more via a delivery method not in use for an existing federal Prison Education Program (PEP).¹ ² ³

¹See the Policy on Instructional Modalities
²See the Policy on Competency Based Education
³See the Policy and Procedures for Federal Prison Education Programs (PEPs)

6. Substantive Changes for Institutions on Warning, Probation, or Show Cause in the last three academic years, or Provisional Certification for Title IV, HEA Programs

In addition to the substantive changes noted above, institutions on warning, probation, or show cause, currently or at any time in the last three academic years, must treat the following as substantive changes. Institutions under Provisional Certification for Title IV, HEA Programs (see 34 CFR 668.13 at https://gov.ecfr.io) must also treat the following as substantive changes. Submission of a substantive change proposal and COA or Substantive Change Officer approval are required before implementation.

a. A change in an existing degree’s, certificate’s, or diploma’s method of delivery.
b. An aggregate change of 25% or more of the clock hours, credit hours, or content of a degree, certificate, or diploma since the last comprehensive review.
c. The development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs to (1) Accommodate and recognize a student’s existing knowledge, such as knowledge attained through employment or military service; and (2) close competency gaps between demonstrated prior knowledge or competency and the full requirements of a particular course or program.
d. Entering into a written arrangement under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEA Programs offers any portion of one or more of the accredited institution’s degrees, certificates, or diplomas (see 34 CFR 668.5 at https://gov.ecfr.io). This does not apply to transfer articulation agreements.
e. Initiation of an extension site where less than 50% of a degree, certificate or diploma may be completed.
f. First offering of courses using a new modality (e.g., distance, correspondence education, mixed modality, or competency-based education).¹ ²
g. Each offering of programs where 50% or more of a degree, certificate, or diploma may be completed by distance education (online), correspondence education, mixed modality, or competency-based education by the course/credit approach.¹ ²

¹See the Policy on Instructional Modalities
²See the Policy on Competency Based Education
7. Notification Requirements

a. Institutions not on Warning, Probation, Show Cause, or Provisional Certification for Title IV, HEA Programs must report the changes in 6a-d above to the COA office at coa@abhe.org within 30 days or be subject to COA action.

b. Initiation of an additional location under a pre-approval waiver must also be reported to the COA office within 30 days, along with the required documentation (see the Policy and Procedures on Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus).

c. The institution is expected to review its Accreditation Profile in the ABHE Online Directory periodically and notify the COA staff of any changes. Such information includes accreditation status, approved programs, delivery modes, and all off-campus instructional locations. The institution is expected to verify Accreditation Profile information at least once per year.

8. Changes which May be Acted on by the COA Substantive Change Officer

a. The COA deputizes a member of the COA professional staff as Substantive Change Officer to approve or disapprove the following changes in a timely, fair, and equitable manner:
   2c  Addition of credentials that represent a significant departure from existing programs
   2e  Entering into a written arrangement with an institution not certified for Title IV to offer more than 25% but less than 50% of a degree, certificate, or diploma
   2g  A change in the way an institution measures student progress
   2h  A substantial increase in the number of clock hours or credit hours awarded, or an increase in the level of credential awarded
   2j  Addition of a permanent location at which the institution is conducting a teach-out
   5a  Addition of a credential where a student may complete 50% or more via a new delivery method

When an institution is uncertain if a change is substantive or not, the COA Substantive Change Officer should be consulted at least 6 months before the intended implementation. Should an institution disagree with Substantive Change Officer’s decision, the matter will be referred to the respective COA committee for a decision at the next scheduled meeting. A final decision concerning 2e (entering into a written arrangement under which an institution not certified for Title IV offers more than 25% but less than 50% of a degree, certificate, or diploma) will be made by the Substantive Change Officer within 90 days of submission of an adequately documented request, or if referred to the COA, within 180 days.

9. Pace of Change

1. The COA recognizes that during a time of rapid change, an institution may experience weakened compliance with the Standards for Accreditation. When multiple changes are compounded, they may require a new, comprehensive evaluation of the institution. A comprehensive evaluation requires the submission of self-study documents addressing all
ABHE standards, an on-site evaluation team visit, and a COA decision to grant new accreditation encompassing the changes proposed. Changes within a 12-month period that trigger such a visit include any of the following combinations:

Two of these:
   a. Relocation of the main campus
   b. Merger or change in legal status, form of control, or ownership
   c. Financial stress as indicated by a Financial Responsibility Composite Score (FRCS) below 1.0

Plus two of these:
   a. Addition of credentials or programs that are a significant departure from previous offerings
   b. Addition of graduate degrees, certificates, or diplomas by an institution that previously offered only undergraduate degrees or certificates, or addition of doctoral degrees, certificates, or diplomas by an institution that previously offered only master’s degrees or graduate certificates
   c. Offering of the first credential or program where 50% or more is available via a new modality
   d. Initiation of an additional location or branch campus

Procedure for Gaining Approval of Substantive Change

1. Substantive change proposals must be submitted electronically to coa@abhe.org and adhere to the submission and format instructions in the ABHE Report Guide (available at abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents). Substantive change proposals should follow the Substantive Change Form template also available at abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents. Since the substantive change form is designed to accommodate a broad range of substantive changes, the COA Substantive Change Officer may waive completion of sections of this form that do not provide meaningful analysis relevant to a specific situation. Institutions should contact the Substantive Change Officer for guidance in completing the form as needed. The substantive change fee is due upon submission of a substantive change proposal. Decisions on substantive changes which may be acted on by the COA Substantive Change Officer will be rendered within 90 days of submission of adequate documentation. Substantive changes that require COA action are considered by the COA on the following schedule:

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<tr>
<th>Proposal Received by</th>
<th>COA Decision by</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>July 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>November 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 15</td>
<td>March 15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Substantive changes for accredited institutions are reviewed by the Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change (PRSC) and for candidate institutions by the Committee on
Applicant and Candidate Status (APCAN). Substantive changes must be approved by the COA. Substantive change applications addressing issues of institutional compliance with federal, state, or provincial regulations may be reviewed by the Commission between scheduled meetings. Note that applicant institutions report changes through their annual progress report to APCAN rather than submitting substantive change proposals.

2. The institution is responsible to provide thorough documentation relating to the proposed substantive change. Such documentation must include, as a minimum, the purpose and rationale for the change in reference to the institutional mission and educational goals; evidence/findings of a careful assessment of the need and/or demand for the change; a comprehensive description of the change; responsible estimates of required resources (e.g., facilities, personnel, finances, learning resources, information technology, infrastructure); a plan for procurement and/or allocation of needed resources; any structural alterations necessary for implementation of the change; evidence of due consideration and authorization of the change through appropriate channels of institutional governance; the anticipated impact of the change upon institutional stability, and the effective date of the change (which cannot be retroactive). The proposal should also address satisfaction of applicable ABHE policies where appropriate. When the change involves a new location or new degree, proof of governmental authorization, if applicable, is required. Where accreditation approval is required prior to government authorization, the COA may provide provisional approval with final approval contingent upon government authorization.

3. Substantive changes must not be implemented by an institution until approval is received from the COA. The COA may approve the change, disapprove the change, or defer a decision pending the receipt of additional documentation.
   a. Approval of a substantive change is an indication that implementation is not likely to jeopardize the institution’s accreditation. At the COA’s option, it may (1) require no follow-up activity until the institution’s next scheduled reaffirmation, (2) require the submission of a progress report after a specified period of time, (3) request that the institution host the COA Executive Director or his representative for an on-site evaluation after a specified period of time, or (4) request that the institution host an evaluation team visit after a specified period of time.
   b. Disapproval of a substantive change is an indication that implementation will likely jeopardize the institution’s accreditation.

4. Approval will not be granted for any substantive change that adversely affects the capacity of the institution to continue meeting the Standards. Approval is required before implementation of a substantive change, and the effective date of the inclusion of the change within the institution’s scope of accreditation is the date on which the COA approves the substantive change. Retroactive approvals will not be granted. An institution that implements a substantive change without COA approval may be subject to COA sanction, including a show cause order.
5. Should an institution proceed with implementation of a substantive change after receiving disapproval from the COA, a show cause order will automatically be issued. Willful disregard of a COA decision will result in negative action by the COA.

6. An approved substantive change that has not been implemented within two years must be updated and resubmitted to the COA for consideration.

Changes Requiring a Site Visit

Establishing or relocating a main campus, branch campus, or additional location, including all federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites, requires a visit by a representative of the COA staff within six months after implementation of the change. Visits are also required to all branch campuses and a representative sample of additional locations during the three years before a COA decision on reaffirmation of accreditation. See the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus for further information.

Items for review when establishing or relocating an additional location or branch campus are provided in the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus. Items for review when relocating a main campus are below. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR at least one week prior to the visit.

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the relocated campus. Highlight changes in offerings since the approved Substantive Change Request.

2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the relocation since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the relocated campus.

3. Describe any changes in the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the relocated campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the relocation since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the relocated campus since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.

6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate at this location or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through this location since the approved Substantive Change Request.

7. Provide evidence that the relocated campus has adequate administrative personnel.
The COA may require a COA staff visit where clarifications are needed concerning other substantive changes prior to approval as well.

Policy on Competency-Based Education and Direct Assessment

Traditional education has historically focused on time as the measure of academic engagement: hours in class, time doing homework or research, internship or practice hours, four-year degrees, and so forth. The federal credit hour definition reflects this time orientation:

(1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time;

or

(2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

Assessment is typically based on relative achievement of broad learning outcomes, with time as the constant.

Competency-based education (CBE) takes an alternate approach, defining learning as the mastery of specific units of knowledge or skill with a clearly defined threshold for success. Time and learning experiences are typically flexible with the measure of performance and outcome fixed—the inversion of the traditional approach to credit hours.

The challenge for institutions and accreditors is establishing assurances of quality and measures of comparability with such contrasting approaches. The purpose of this policy is to identify expectations and provide guidance for evaluating the quality of CBE in a higher education context which is typically measured in credit hours.

Definitions:

**Competency** – a clearly defined, measurable outcome demonstrating achievement of, or proficiency in, a specified unit of knowledge or skill.

**Competency-based education** – An outcomes-based system of instruction in which the student’s demonstrated proficiency in specified knowledge or skills is the basis for measuring satisfaction of course, program, or degree requirements. CBE focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes (what a student knows or can do) as the direct measure of student learning, regardless of time spent in class, study, or research, which is an indirect measure of student learning. Examples of direct assessment instruments include projects, papers, examinations, presentations, performances, and portfolios. Students’ progress through the program by satisfying competencies either at the course level or program level.
A course requiring time in class, study, research, lab work, internship hours, or other academic engagement which satisfies the ABHE credit hour definition and utilizing competencies to validate outcomes is not competency-based education and not subject to the special requirements of this policy. Such courses should be treated within the context of regular credit hours.

A CBE program may be identified as (1) Course/Credit Approach, (2) Direct Assessment Approach, or (3) Hybrid Approach.

Course/credit approach – An instructional program in which the requirements for individual courses are satisfied through direct assessment—demonstrated achievement of specified competencies apart from any measurement of academic engagement (time in class, study, research, etc.). Students complete courses and credit hours/clock hours through fulfillment of competencies rather than time in academic engagement.

Direct assessment approach – An instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. Direct assessment programs are typically self-paced and organized by competencies rather than courses. Transcripts may list either competencies achieved or course equivalents.

Hybrid approach – An instructional program that utilizes direct assessment for fulfillment of a portion of the program and credit hours or clock hours for fulfillment of the remainder of the program.

Initiation of CBE programs by course/credit approach, direct assessment approach, or hybrid approach is subject to the ABHE Policy on Substantive Change. A substantive change proposal and Commission on Accreditation (COA) approval is required in each of the following circumstances:

1. Addition of the first program at an institution where 50% or more of the program is available by the course/credit approach. If 50% or more of a program by the course/credit approach was not in place at the last comprehensive review, the offering of the first program by this approach during the current accreditation cycle is a substantive change.

2. Addition of each competency-based education program where 50% or more of the program will be available by direct assessment.

Evaluation Criteria

A substantive change proposal for CBE should address the following items which the COA will use as the review criteria:

1. Program design and the institution’s approach to CBE are appropriate and faculty led. Competencies should be validated, demonstrate performance proficiency, be
appropriate for the subject and degree level, and be sufficiently numerous to address all
outcomes expected from equivalent traditional courses or programs.

2. The institution must explain how it determines credit hours or credit hour equivalents,
specifically in relation to competency-based programs, and demonstrate that the
assignment of credit hours or credit hour equivalents is warranted and conforms to
general practices in higher education.

3. The institution is devoting sufficient faculty and other resources to its CBE programs to
support students and faculty. Students should have ongoing access to qualified faculty,
student services, and library access/services throughout the period of enrollment.

4. All CBE courses or learning activities include regular (ongoing) and substantive
interaction between students and instructors.

Faculty must be qualified by appropriate academic credential and/or experience in the subject
matter. Access means direct student contact with faculty for feedback on assignments,
assessment, information on course content, and advising.

Regular and substantive interaction means that contact will be periodic, predictable, initiated by
the professor, and relevant to the academic subject matter. It may include instruction, feedback
to assignments, or discussion of subject matter. Optional or strictly student-initiated engagement
is insufficient for meeting this expectation.

An institution that wishes to award Federal Student Aid (FSA) funds in a program using direct
assessment must apply for approval from the U.S. Department of Education, in addition to
securing accreditor approval. The program must meet the requirements of 34 CFR 668.10. An
institution may also be required to secure state approval for a CBE program.

Adopted June 2016; Revised July 2020
Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites 
Geographically Separate from the Main Campus

Introduction

The Commission on Accreditation recognizes three types of educational sites geographically separate from the main campus:

1. **Extension site** – A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of the institution where students and faculty regularly meet in classes but where students may not complete 50% or more of course work toward requirements for one or more of the institution’s degrees, certificates, or diplomas via face-to-face or hybrid courses.

2. **Additional location** – A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of the institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution, at which the institution offers at least 50% of a degree, certificate or diploma. An additional location participates in the title IV, HEA programs only through the certification of the main campus. A Federal, State, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other similar correctional institution is considered an additional location even if a student receives instruction primarily through distance education or correspondence courses at that location. See specific requirements for federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites in the *Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs)*.

3. **Branch campus** – A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of the institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution; and is independent from the main campus, meaning the location (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized education credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority. Branch campuses must be certified by the U.S. Department of Education for participation in title IV, HEA programs.

All branch campuses and additional locations are considered alternative academic patterns and are subject to the general provisions of Standard 11d. Alternative Academic Patterns, which should be consulted in addition to this policy. The *Policy on Substantive Change* should be consulted when initiating or relocating branch campuses and additional locations. Establishment of an extension site requires Commission notification only provided the institution is not currently or has not been on sanction in the past three academic years and/or is not under provisional certification for Title IV, HEA programs (see *Policy on Substantive Change*).

Note that hybrid and streaming courses that have a required on-site class component are included in the percentage of courses offered at a given location. Institutions must carefully monitor the course offerings provided at a given off-campus location to ensure that they are aware of any circumstances where the offerings may be approaching the 50% level.
Procedures

Establishment or relocation of a branch campus or additional location, including a site serving confined or incarcerated individuals, is considered a substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. Substantive change procedures specific to federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites can be found in the Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs).

A change of physical location for an established branch campus or additional location is considered a relocation.

Prior to establishment or relocation of a branch campus or additional location, an institution is required to submit for Commission on Accreditation (COA) approval a comprehensive written proposal addressing the location’s compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main campus, and appropriate documents specifying:

1. Organizational and administrative relationships between the branch campus or additional location and the parent institution
2. The institution’s fiscal and administrative capability to operate the branch campus or additional location
3. Institutional processes for regular evaluation of the branch campus or additional location
4. A list of programs that will be offered at the branch campus or additional location
5. Evidence that the branch campus or additional location will meet all Standards for Accreditation that pertain to educational sites geographically separate from the main campus
6. Verification of the following:
   a. Academic control of the branch campus or additional location is clearly documented by the institution.
   b. The institution has adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems in place for the branch campus or additional location.
   c. The institution is financially stable.
   d. The expansion is the result of institutional planning.

In addition to the six items above, proposals for establishing or relocating a branch campus must include a business plan documenting projected revenues, expenditures, and cash flow for the branch campus.

A site visit is required within six months of implementation of a new or relocated branch campus or additional location or with a change of ownership or control of a branch campus.

This procedure must be followed for all branch campuses. The procedure must be followed for all additional locations unless a pre-approval waiver (see section below) has been granted. Please note that a pre-approval waiver cannot be used to establish federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites. Institutions seeking approval to establish PEP sites must submit a
comprehensive written proposal(s) as described in the *Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs)*.

Discontinuation of a branch campus or an additional location where 100% of a degree program may be earned requires submission of a teach-out plan for affected students and COA approval of the plan (see the *Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements*). Teach-out requirements for federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites can be found in the *Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs)*.

**Pre-Approval Waivers for Additional Locations**

The COA may, under certain conditions, waive an institution’s pre-approval requirements relative to establishing or relocating an additional location. To be eligible for such a waiver, the institution must have

1. completed at least one cycle of accreditation
2. received approval for three additional locations (the request for a waiver may be submitted with the request for a third additional location)
3. no instances of warning, probation, or show cause over the last three academic years
4. not been placed on provisional certification for Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) Programs as provided in 34 CFR 668.13 (see https://gov.ecfr.io)

Pre-approval waivers are not automatic, and the institution cannot initiate additional locations under a pre-approval waiver until a substantive change proposal seeking pre-approval waiver status has been approved by the COA.

The substantive change proposal for a pre-approval waiver must evidence sufficient capacity to add additional locations without individual prior approvals and an adequate system to assure quality across a distributed enterprise, including the following:

1. Clearly identified academic control
2. Regular evaluation of the locations
3. Adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems
4. Financial stability
5. Long-range planning for expansion

Once a pre-approval waiver has been granted, the institution must submit, within 30 days of initiation or relocation of an additional location, evidence of:

1. Clearly identified academic control relative to additional locations
2. A system of data collection and regular evaluation to ensure comparability of educational quality at all additional locations
3. Adequate qualified faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems for all additional locations
4. Demonstrated financial stability typically reflected in the institution’s most recent Financial Responsibility Composite Score (FRCS) being 1.50 or higher
5. Comprehensive long-range planning for maintenance and expansion of additional locations

Notification must also include a list of programs that will be available at the new location.

Pre-approval waivers relative to additional locations will be reviewed by the COA at least every five years. At the time of the five-year review, site visits to a representative sample of not less than 25% of additional locations operated under the waiver will be required. Pre-approval waivers will be suspended in cases where an institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change in control, unless and until such time as the COA re-determines that the institution continues to meet the conditions for the pre-approval of additional locations. Pre-approval waivers will be suspended when an institution is on warning, probation, show cause order, or provisional certification for Title IV, HEA Programs. Pre-approval waivers do not apply where the institution acquires an institution, program, or location of another institution or adds a permanent location at a site where it is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that ceased operating before all students completed their program of study.

Institutions that are not eligible for a pre-approval waiver or do not seek a pre-approval waiver (substantive change), must host a site visit within six months of establishment of any new additional location.

Institutions that have a pre-approval waiver and establish five or more additional locations in a single academic year (July-June) must host a site visit to a representative sample of 25% of these additional locations within six months of the establishment of the fifth additional location.

Site Verification Visits

The purpose of a site visit for a branch campus or additional location within 6 months of COA approval is to verify that the location has the personnel, facilities, and resources the institution claimed it had in its substantive change proposal to the COA. The visit should also verify that the branch campus or additional location does not compromise the institution’s stability and resources.

Branch Campus

ABHE site verification visits to branch campuses are conducted by a Commission Staff Representative (CSR) who spends one day at the site. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR at least two weeks prior to the visit.

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the branch campus. Highlight changes in offerings since the approved Substantive Change Request.
2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the branch campus.

3. Describe any changes in the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered at the branch campus?

4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the branch campus since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.

6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate the branch campus at this location or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through the branch campus since the approved Substantive Change Request.

7. Describe the administrative or supervisory organization of the branch campus and its relationship to the main campus. Discuss how this structure is appropriate to the size and scope of the branch campus and supports institutional goals.

8. Describe the hiring authority of the branch campus. Provide relevant examples.

9. Describe the budgetary authority of the branch campus. Provide a budget summary for the current year and documentation of the budget approval process.

10. Describe how financial outcomes to date compare with projections in the business plan submitted for the Substantive Change proposal.

Additional Location

ABHE site verification visits to additional locations, including sites serving confined or incarcerated individuals, are conducted by a Commission Staff Representative (CSR) who spends a half-day at the site. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR at least two weeks prior to the visit. See specific verification visit requirements for federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites in the Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs).

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the additional location. Highlight changes in offerings since the approved Substantive Change Request.

2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the additional location.
3. Describe any changes in the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the additional location since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered through this location?

5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the additional location since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.

6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate at the additional location or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through this location since the approved Substantive Change Request.

7. Provide evidence that the additional location is adequately supervised by the main campus and has adequate administrative personnel.

Site Verification Visit Reports

Following a site verification visit, the COA representative is expected to prepare a written report outlining his or her findings with respect to the above questions. The report will be shared with both the institution and the COA. Upon receipt of the report, the institution will have opportunity to issue a response outlining its concerns with or any needed corrections to the report.

COA Review of Site Verification Visit Reports

At its regular meetings, the COA will review reports and related responses of visits made to additional locations or branch campuses by Commission Staff Representatives. Following each meeting, institutions will be notified of any special COA concerns based on visit findings. The notification process will follow the same procedures employed for notifying an institution of any COA action. The site visit report, the institution’s response, and the record of any COA action taken relative to the report will become part of the institution’s permanent file.

Procedures for Branch Campus and Additional Location Visits During an Accreditation Cycle

ABHE will conduct site visits to all branch campuses and a representative sample of at least 25% of an institution’s additional locations during an accreditation cycle. Only visits completed during the 36 months preceding COA’s review of the institution for candidate status, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation may be considered in the representative sample. The following procedure will be applied to ensure a mechanism for implementation of this policy.

- When the Fall and Spring evaluation team schedules are prepared, COA staff will review institutions scheduled for candidate status, initial accreditation, and reaffirmation of accreditation visits and notify the COA Executive Director of the additional locations operated by these institutions.
• The COA Executive Director will identify a representative sample of at least 25% of each institution's additional locations based on the number of locations and nature of programs offered and specify locations to be visited.
• Once a visiting team chair has been identified, the COA Executive Director will confer with the chair to determine whether an evaluation team member or COA staff member should conduct the branch campus and additional location site visit(s).
• The COA Executive Director will notify the institution of the required visit(s), location(s) to be visited, and assigned evaluator(s). The institution and evaluator(s) will schedule a mutually agreed date and time for the visit(s). The institution will be sent a copy of the COA’s questions for branch campus and additional location visits (below) by the COA Executive Director.
• If the evaluation is conducted by an evaluation team member and prior to submission of the evaluation team report, the report on the branch campus/additional location may be folded into the evaluation team report; otherwise, a separate report will be prepared for COA review.
• See requirements for PEPs sites during an accreditation cycle in the Policy and Procedures for Prison Education Programs (PEPs).

### For Branch Campuses

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<tbody>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Describe and document the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the branch campus. Have any of these changed since the last review? Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the branch campus.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Describe and document the budgetary authority of the branch campus. Provide a budget summary for the current year and documentation of the budget approval process.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Provide financial statements showing revenues, expenditures, and cash flows for the branch campus for the past three years and projections for the current year and the next two years.</td>
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**For Additional Locations**

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<td>7.</td>
<td>Discuss and provide evidence that the additional location is supervised by the main campus and has adequate administrative personnel.</td>
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Policy and Procedures for Federal Prison Education Programs (PEPs)

Introduction

The federal Prison Education Program (PEP) provides Pell Grant access to confined or incarcerated individuals. A confined or incarcerated individual is an individual who is serving a criminal sentence in a Federal, State or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility, or other similar correctional institution. An individual is not considered incarcerated if that individual is subject to or serving an involuntary civil commitment, in a halfway house or home detention, or is sentenced to serve only weekends.

Institutional participation in the federal program is voluntary. To participate, institutions (1) enter into an agreement with an oversight entity (as defined below), (2) secure COA substantive change approval for a Prison Education Program (PEP), and (3) secure federal approval. The institution is responsible for coordinating the approval processes and monitoring the program with (a) the oversight entity, (b) the ABHE Commission on Accreditation, and (c) the U.S. Department of Education.

Not all programs serving confined or incarcerated individuals are PEPs. This policy applies only to federal PEP programs. All other sites serving confined or incarcerated individuals are reviewed and approved as additional locations. (See the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Separate from the Main Campus.)

Oversight Entity Agreement

The institution enters into a written agreement with an oversight entity or entities responsible for the site where the PEP will be delivered. The oversight entity may be a state department of corrections or other entity responsible for overseeing correctional facilities, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or other oversight entity consistent with federal regulations. The institution is responsible for securing the agreement before submitting a substantive change application for PEP approval to the COA; a copy of the signed final written agreement is submitted as part of the prospectus.

Prison Education Program Substantive Change Approval

An institution must receive approval for its first program at its first two PEP instructional sites. The Commission reviews an institution’s capacity, financial stability, planning, and resources to initiate and sustain PEPs to ensure the quality and integrity of curricula, instruction, learning support, library and information resources, faculty qualifications, and plans to ensure ongoing comparability of PEP versus non-PEP programs at the institution.

Establishment or relocation of a PEP is considered a substantive change to be processed in accord with the Policy on Substantive Change. Prior to establishment or relocation of a PEP, an institution is required to submit for Commission on Accreditation (COA) approval a
comprehensive written proposal addressing the location’s compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus, and appropriate documents specifying:

1. Organizational and administrative relationships between the PEP and the parent institution.
2. The institution’s fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the PEP, including a specific PEP budget.
3. Institutional processes for regular evaluation of the PEP.
4. Programs and related curricula that will be offered at the PEP.
5. Evidence that the PEP will meet all Standards for Accreditation that pertain to educational sites geographically separate from the main campus.
6. Evidence that the institution, in collaboration with the oversight entity, has developed plans for determining that the PEP meets the same standards as substantially similar programs at the institution that are not PEPs.
7. Verification of the following:
   a. Academic control of the PEP is clearly documented by the institution.
   b. The institution has adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems in place for the PEP.
   c. The institution is financially stable.
   d. The expansion is the result of institutional planning.

Because ABHE requires review and approval of all PEP instructional sites, institutions may need to submit more than one substantive change application when establishing PEPs—one to secure approval for participation in the federal PEP program at the first location and subsequent applications to approve offering the PEP at other locations. An institution may submit no more than two sites in one PEP substantive change application. A substantive change application to add a federal PEP program includes approval to offer 50% or more of a program at the site, regardless of delivery method. All substantive change requirements, policies, and Institutional Accreditation Standards apply to PEP programs, without exception.

Federal regulations stipulate that:

1. An institution subject to adverse action (i.e., withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or candidate status) by the ABHE Commission on Accreditation
   a. will have its PEP approval rescinded,
   b. must submit teach-out plans for closure approval for all PEP programs and PEP off-campus instructional sites, and
   c. is ineligible for PEP re-approval (by submitting a new PEP prospectus) for five years commencing on the date of the adverse action.

2. Subsequent to its initial PEP approval, an institution adding a method of delivery not previously used in its PEPs must secure approval prior to implementation (See the Policy on Substantive Change, Change in Modality/Delivery Method, 5.C)
Because federal Prison Education Programs may constitute multiple types of substantive change, related substantive change applications may need to address multiple requirements. Relevant substantive change types include:

- Participation in the federal Prison Education Program (first program(s) at first and/or second site)
- Initiation of a second Prison Education Program site (first program(s) at second site)
- Initiation of additional PEP sites beyond the first two or relocation of any PEP site
- Addition of a method of delivery not previously used for PEPs (distance education, competency-based education course-credit, competency-based education direct assessment, mixed modality)
- Addition of a program at a PEP site that represents a significant departure from existing programs at the institution
- Other substantive change types as defined in the Policy on Substantive Change as determined by the institution.

Substantive change applications for PEP sites are reviewed by the Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change and then sent to the Commission on Accreditation for final action. Submission deadlines are provided in the Report Guide available at https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/

### Required PEP Site Visits

All PEP sites must meet ABHE Standards for Accreditation and requirements of the Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus, including a required site verification visit within 6 months of site implementation.

ABHE site verification visits to PEP sites are conducted by a Commission Staff Representative (CSR) who spends approximately a half-day at the site. In preparation for the visit, the institution should prepare and submit written responses for the items below to the CSR at least two weeks prior to the visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites – Verification Visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the PEP site.</td>
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<td>2. Describe any changes in the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the PEP site since the approved Substantive Change Request. Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at this site.</td>
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<td>4. Describe any changes in the student services provided at the PEP site since the approved Substantive Change Request. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered at this site?</td>
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5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the PEP site since its inception with courses taught and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.

6. Discuss and provide evidence for any changes in authorization to operate at the PEP site or to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students through this location since the approved Substantive Change Request.

7. Provide evidence that the main campus exercises control of the PEP site and that the site has adequate administrative personnel.

8. Document how the institution, in collaboration with the oversight entity, plans to determine that the PEP meets the same standards as substantially similar programs at the institution that are not PEPs.

Evaluation team visits for initial accreditation and reaffirmation accreditation will include visits to all PEP sites. Institutional self-studies should include the following information for each PEP site.

### For Federal Prison Education Program (PEP) sites – Evaluation Team Visit

1. Provide a current and complete listing of all courses and programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential offered at the PEP site. Highlight changes in offerings since the last review.

2. Describe and document the financial, human, facility, and technological resources that support the PEP site. Have any of these changed since the last review? Describe how these resources are adequate to support the current offerings at the site.

3. Describe and document the library and learning resources made available to students studying at the PEP site. How are these resources adequate for the educational offerings delivered at this site?

4. Describe and document the student services provided at the PEP site. How are these services adequate for the educational offerings delivered at this site?

5. Provide a complete faculty roster for the PEP site with courses taught for the past three years and evidence of appropriate faculty qualifications.

6. Discuss and provide evidence for authorization to operate this PEP site and to offer the credentials that the institution makes available to students at this site.

7. Provide evidence that the main campus exercises control of the federal PEP site and that the site has adequate administrative personnel.

8. Document how the institution, in collaboration with the oversight entity, determines that the PEP meets the same standards as substantially similar programs at the institution that are not PEPs.

Adopted August 2023
Policy on Confidentiality

The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) is comprised of institutions of biblical higher education that hold accredited, candidate, applicant, or member status. The ABHE Board of Directors and its related Committees have oversight of Association operations. The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) is an independent decision-making body that determines the status of institutions seeking to pursue or maintain accredited membership within the Association. The COA has exclusive jurisdiction over all documents generated by or otherwise associated with accreditation processes. The COA Executive Director working with the COA Chair, has primary responsibility to ensure the security of COA records. The COA Executive Director also exercises on behalf of the COA the exclusive right to grant or deny access to COA records to individuals on the basis of a legitimate “business need to know.” Directory information, including but not necessarily limited to, institutional and key official names, addresses, telephone, e-mail, and history of public accreditation actions (as required by law), may be disseminated unless specific lawful restrictions are stipulated in writing.

To properly evaluate an institution or program, the COA must have access to all documents that give insight into the true condition of the institution or program. Refusal of an institution or program to provide full and honest disclosure of its affairs is sufficient justification for denial or withdrawal of applicant, candidate, or accredited status. The COA and its representatives will take appropriate measures in its own handling of information to maintain the privacy rights of individuals.

The COA regards an institution or program’s self-study materials, evaluation documents, progress reports, and financial statements as confidential. The minutes of the COA are also confidential.

Confidential materials are not available to the ABHE Board of Directors, non-Commission Association decision-making bodies, or the public at large. However, they are available to those with legitimate accreditation concerns on a “need-to-know” basis. They are also available to those agencies charged with evaluating the COA for purposes of certifying its integrity on behalf of the public.

Should an institution or program operate in a manner that raises public concern, the COA will have the prerogative of disclosing publicly any confidential material required to explain the reason for its action regarding the applicant, candidate, or accredited status of the institution or program. Should the COA be contacted by the media regarding a COA-accredited, candidate, or applicant institution, the Executive Director or designee will inform the institution’s CEO.

Policy on Public Disclosure

ABHE will maintain and make available to the public, written materials describing:

1. Each type of accreditation and candidate status (preaccreditation) it grants;

2. The procedures that institutions or programs must follow in applying for accreditation or candidate status;

3. The standards and procedures the Commission on Accreditation (COA) uses to determine whether to grant, reaffirm, reinstate, restrict, deny, revoke, terminate, or take any other action related to each type of accreditation and candidate status that it grants;

4. The institutions and programs that it currently accredits or preaccredits and, for each institution and program, the year that the COA will next review or reconsider the institution or program for accreditation or candidate status; and

5. The names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of
   (i) The members of the ABHE policy and decision-making bodies; and
   (ii) ABHE’s principal administrative staff.

ABHE will notify relevant governmental agencies, accrediting bodies, and the public of decisions regarding an institution’s status as described in the Policy on Communication of Accreditation Decisions.

Adopted October 2006; Revised May 2010, July 2020, February 2021
Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements

For all candidate institutions and when an accredited institution may not be able to deliver a program to enrolled students as promised, an approved teach-out plan is required to provide for the equitable treatment of affected students. The institution must submit a teach-out plan proposal for review and approval. The proposal must be viable and ensure that enrolled students will have opportunity to graduate from a comparable program.

A teach-out plan is a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. A teach-out agreement is a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program offered, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

Circumstances Requiring a Teach-Out Plan

1. Candidate status – all institutions on candidate status must have a teach-out plan approved as a contingency for the possibility that the institution may not achieve accreditation within the specified time limit. The teach-out plan must ensure students completing the teach-out would meet curricular requirements for professional licensure or certification, if any. It must also include a list of academic programs offered by the institution and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach-out agreement with the institution.
2. The U.S. Secretary of Education notifies the COA of a determination by the institution's independent auditor expressing doubt about the institution's ability to operate as a going concern or indicating an adverse opinion or a finding of material weakness related to financial stability.
3. The COA places the institution on probation or show cause order.
4. The Secretary notifies the COA that the institution is participating in Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA) Programs under a provisional program participation agreement and the Secretary has required a teach-out plan as a condition of participation.

Circumstances Requiring a Teach-Out Plan and if Practicable, a Teach-Out Agreement

1. The U.S. Secretary of Education notifies the COA that it has placed the institution on the reimbursement payment method under 34 CFR 668.162(c) or the heightened cash monitoring payment method requiring the Secretary's review of the institution's supporting documentation under 34 CFR 668.162(d)(2).
2. The Secretary notifies the COA that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to
limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA.

3. The COA acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation or candidate status of the institution.

4. The institution notifies the COA that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides 100% of at least one program, including if the location is being moved and is considered by the Secretary to be a closed school.

5. A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the COA that an institution’s license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.

Requirements for an Acceptable Teach-Out Plan

An acceptable teach-out plan must include the following:

1. A list of currently enrolled students
2. A list of academic programs offered by the institution
3. The names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach-out agreement with the institution.
4. A plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on State refund policies.
5. A record retention plan to be provided to all enrolled students that delineates the final disposition of teach-out records (e.g., student transcripts, billing, financial aid records).
6. Verification that the receiving institution(s) meets the requirements below, including accreditation and provision for students to complete their programs without a change in delivery method or the need to move or travel for substantial distances or durations to complete the program.

If a teach-out plan is approved that includes a program or institution that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, the COA will notify that accrediting agency of its approval.

Requirements for an Acceptable Teach-Out Agreement

An accredited or candidate (preaccredited) institution that is closing is required to develop a teach-out agreement. The COA may require a teach-out agreement in other situations where the prospect of closure is high. An institution may elect to enter into a teach-out agreement on its own. In all these situations, the teach-out agreement must conform to the requirements in this policy, including approval.

An acceptable teach-out agreement must include the following:

1. A complete list of students currently enrolled in each program at the institution and the program requirements each student has completed.
2. A plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on State refund policies.
3. A record retention plan to be provided to all enrolled students that delineates the final disposition of teach-out records (e.g., student transcripts, billing, financial aid records).
4. Information on the number and types of credits the teach-out receiving institution is willing to accept prior to the student's enrollment.
5. A clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.

Requirements for the Receiving Institution in a Teach-Out Plan or Teach-Out Agreement

The sending institution in a teach-out plan or teach-out agreement is responsible for documenting that the receiving institution is capable of providing a comparable educational credential and equitable treatment of students received through the teach-out agreement. The receiving institution must:

1. Have the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, delivery modality, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations; however, while an option via an alternate method of delivery may be made available to students, such an option is not sufficient unless an option via the same method of delivery as the original educational program is also provided.
2. Have the capacity to carry out its mission and meet all obligations to existing students.
3. Demonstrate that it (1) can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel for substantial distances or durations; and (2) will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

An institution cannot be a receiving institution in a teach-out plan or teach-out agreement under the following circumstances:

1. It is under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.
2. The institution's independent auditor expresses doubt about the institution's ability to operate as a going concern or indicating an adverse opinion or a finding of material weakness related to financial stability.
3. The institution’s accreditor has placed it on probation or the equivalent.
4. The institution is participating in Title IV, HEA Programs under a provisional program participation agreement and the Secretary of Education has required a teach-out plan as a condition of participation.
5. The institution is not accredited or preaccredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the appropriate provincial authority (for Canadian institutions).
Process for Approval

Teach-out plans and teach-out agreements are to be submitted to coa@abhe.org as soon as practicable after identification that a teach-out plan or agreement is needed, but in all instances within not more than 60 days. The COA Substantive Change Officer will review the documentation and approve the proposal, disapprove the proposal, or advise the institution concerning deficiencies in the proposal. The institution will have 30 days to submit a revised proposal. The Substantive Change Officer’s decision will be referred to the appropriate COA committee (Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status for candidate institutions, Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change for accredited institutions) at the next scheduled meeting for ratification. The institution may proceed with the teach-out plan or agreement once the Substantive Change Officer has approved the proposal. The COA may require subsequent reporting or clarification. If the institution disagrees with the Substantive Change Officer’s decision, the matter will be referred to the appropriate COA committee for review at the next scheduled meeting.

An institution must provide the COA with copies of all notifications from the institution related to the institution's closure or to teach-out options to ensure the information accurately represents students' ability to transfer credits and may require corrections.

If an institution holding accredited or candidate status with the COA closes without a teach-out plan or agreement, the COA will work with the U.S. Department of Education and the appropriate state/provincial agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

Adopted February 2011; Revised June 2016, July 2020, November 2020
Policy on Dealing with Conflicting Requirements of Oversight Bodies

Policy

An institution found to be out of compliance with an ABHE Standard because of a conflicting requirement of another accrediting body or governmental agency may appeal to the Commission on Accreditation (COA) for an alternative means of satisfying the ABHE Standard.

Procedures

1. The institution must acknowledge the nature, extent, and implications of its need to seek alternative means of compliance of a COA Standard.
2. The institution must provide documentation demonstrating that a conflict with other published requirements, in fact, exists and propose alternative means of compliance. The proposal must include a rationale demonstrating its reason for believing that the alternative will achieve a satisfactory result.
3. The institution’s proposal should be provided to the Committee on Criteria prior to the filing deadline of its first meeting following identification of the conflict.
4. The Committee on Criteria will review the proposal and prepare a recommendation for the consideration of the full COA regarding the request.
5. The COA will approve or reject the proposal for an alternative means of compliance with the Standard. In cases where the COA rejects the proposed alternative means of compliance, it will endeavor to furnish materials and offer guidance as to how the institution may resolve the conflict.

Guiding Values

1. Exceptions to normal compliance with a Standard will be based on a genuine conflict with the requirements of another accrediting agency or governmental body, not simply a marketing issue.
2. The alternative proposed by the institution must reflect an understanding of the purpose for the ABHE requirement and an effort to fulfill the purpose of the ABHE Standard as fully as possible.
3. The institution must demonstrate that the courses or requirements used in place of the expectations of ABHE Standards for Accreditation result in similar or related competencies.
4. The institution must have a demonstrated history of compliance with the COA’s Philosophy of Accreditation.

Adopted February 2007
Policy and Procedures for Monitoring Annual Report Data

Introduction

Each year, ABHE applicant, candidate, and accredited institutions are required to complete an online Annual Report by November 15 that provides data relative to the institution’s enrollment, faculty, financial resources, and student achievement results. The ABHE staff assumes responsibility for monitoring the data presented, requesting a written explanation from institutions outside the designated parameters, and placing the institutions on the agenda for review at the next scheduled meeting of the appropriate Commission on Accreditation (COA) committee. The monitoring process used by the COA staff is outlined in the steps described below.

Institutional Data

The institution will annually update their Accreditation Profile to ensure that institutional information is accurate and current, including the listing of accreditation status, approved programs and off-campus locations, and institutional websites where outcomes data is made available to the public. It also seeks to ensure that institutions are properly following the COA’s Policy on Substantive Change with respect to teaching sites and educational modalities. In cases where it is apparent that an institution has reported extension locations, additional locations, branch campuses, and/or instructional modality that have not been previously approved under the COA’s Policy on Substantive Change, the staff will contact the institution to determine why there is no record of a required approval. Such instances will also be reported along with the institution’s response to the COA’s Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change (PRSC – accredited institutions) or the Committee on Applicant and Candidate status (APCAN – candidate institutions).

Enrollment Data

The COA staff monitors enrollment data with particular attention to institutions that have experienced a 50% or greater increase in enrollment. Where an institution offering distance education has experienced a 50% increase in enrollment, the COA staff will alert the Secretary (U.S. Department of Education). The staff will also alert the appropriate COA committee (PRSC – accredited, APCAN – applicant and candidate) regarding those institutions experiencing 50% or greater growth so that the COA at its regular meeting will be able to determine any special steps that should be taken to ensure that the institution is taking appropriate measures to accommodate its rapid growth. Institutions suffering a loss of enrollment of 20% or greater will also be given special attention by the appropriate COA committee to ensure that their stability is not jeopardized by the downturn in enrollment.
Student Achievement Data

The COA staff will annually monitor retention and graduation/transfer out rates. Institutions having values below the following thresholds will be asked to furnish an explanation and be placed on the agenda of the appropriate COA Committee (PRSC – accredited, APCAN – applicant & candidate) for review:

- Retention rate – 25%
- Graduation/transfer out rate – 25%

Where cohort data is small, the COA will consider multi-year data in its review of institutional performance. The COA will also consider the mission and student population served, realizing that institutions that serve part-time, adult, and transfer students will have different time-related outcomes from institutions that serve traditional undergraduates. Disaggregated data may be used to compare similar institutions with respect to student achievement outcomes. Institutions with notably low student achievement outcomes will be referred to the COA for review.

The COA staff will also review information as it is made available by the U.S. Department of Education to determine institutions that may have performance concerns and report that information to the COA in accordance with the analysis process for achievement data above. Factors considered from USDE data will include 150% graduation rate, first year retention rate, three-year debt repayment rate, and three-year cohort default rate. The COA will consider transfer-out rates in evaluation of graduation rates.

COA staff will also gather and report USDE data to the COA on average annual net price for Title IV students, percentage of students borrowing federal loans, median debt of students who graduate, percentage of part-time students, percentage of Pell recipients, and percentage of students age 25 or above.

Educational Staff

The COA staff will review the data submitted regarding the level of faculty credentials. If it appears that more than 20% of annual credit hours taken by students are taught by faculty who do not possess the appropriate academic credentials, the institution will be asked to furnish an explanation and be placed on the agenda of the appropriate COA Committee (PRSC – accredited; APCAN – applicant and candidate) for review. Institutions using a “team teaching” model of instruction must meet the engagement threshold for appropriately credentialed instructors as outlined in the glossary definition.

Financial Data

Institutions having a Financial Responsibility Composite Score (FRCS) of less than 1.5 and/or answering “no” to more than two of the Financial Compliance questions on the Annual Report will be asked to furnish an explanation and be placed on the Committee on Financial Exigency agenda for review. The explanation should include an action plan outlining steps to address deficiencies where the reported data is not a one-year anomaly.
Tenets of Faith

The failure of an institution to affirm the ABHE Tenets of Faith will be brought to the attention of the COA.

The COA’s Responsibility

Upon receipt of notice that the staff has identified an institution for special attention, the COA will carefully review the institution with respect to the element(s) that caused the staff to place the institution on the COA agenda. Data related to finances will be reviewed by the Committee on Financial Exigency. Other data involving accredited institutions will be reviewed by the Committee on Progress Reports and Substantive Change. Other data involving applicant and candidate institutions will be reviewed by the COA’s Committee on Applicant Status. If with respect to accredited institutions, the COA concludes that special monitoring is required, the COA may exercise a range of options that include the requirement of a progress report regarding the concern(s), a requirement that the institution host a staff visit for the purpose of investigating the concern(s), or a requirement that an institution host a focused visit by a team of evaluators.

In the case of an applicant or candidate institution, any special monitoring function will normally be completed through a combination of the annual staff visit and the related annual progress report. A failure to address the COA’s concerns will jeopardize the institution’s progress towards accreditation.

An institution that develops an action plan to address low performance indicators, has that plan approved by the appropriate COA committee, and is achieving annual benchmarks for fulfillment of the action plan will be considered in compliance with this ABHE policy, and absent other indicators suggesting the contrary, in compliance with ABHE Standards. Institutions which fail to achieve benchmarks in the action plan may be found out of compliance with ABHE Standards and placed on sanction. If an institution’s explanation to the COA the previous year was acceptable and/or the institution is making progress in that area, the COA Executive Director may waive the requirement that an explanation be provided for the current year.

Failure to cooperate with the COA’s request for information and/or review will call into question an institution’s status with the COA. Should the COA determine that an institution’s data is unacceptable because of quality or stability issues, the Commission will take action to place the institution on sanction.

Adopted April 2012; Revised November 2016, February 2019, July 2020, February 2021
Policy on Use of Accreditation Consultants

Accreditation consultants can be of great benefit to both institutions seeking accreditation and accredited institutions pursuing innovation. The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) recognizes two kinds of consultants, Commission Staff Representatives (CSRs) and private consultants.

COA Staff Representative (CSR):

Each applicant institution is assigned a representative from the COA's senior professional staff who will work with the institution and serve as the institution's primary contact with the COA office throughout applicant and candidate status. The Commission Staff Representative (CSR) provides guidance in understanding and interpreting ABHE Standards, policies, and procedures. The CSR also apprises the COA of institutional progress related to achieving and maintaining ABHE accreditation. The CSR fulfills the following functions:

- Conduct an annual visit to the institution in any year that the institution does not host an ABHE evaluation team. The purpose of this visit is twofold: (1) to provide the COA with an on-site report of the institution's progress in addressing the Standards for Accreditation and any concerns the COA may have expressed concerning achievement of the Standards, and (2) to provide guidance and professional advice to the institution concerning ABHE Standards, policies, and procedures.
- Answer questions related to ABHE Standards, policies, and procedures and provide clarification as needed throughout the year. If mutually agreed upon by the CSR and the institution, one follow-up visit per year may be scheduled to provide additional clarification and advice regarding accreditation processes.
- Debrief the institution after COA meetings concerning COA actions. The CSR provides clarification concerning areas where the institution may have questions about a COA action and guidance concerning next steps in responding to COA concerns.
- Accompany and support the visiting team for comprehensive visits for candidate status and initial accreditation to ensure the team has reviewed and commented on all pertinent requirements and provide clarification to the team regarding questions about ABHE Standards, policies, or procedures.
- Represent the COA to the institution. As such, the CSR is not an advocate lobbying for the institution's favor, nor a surrogate in dispensing COA authority. The COA staff representative is an interpreter ensuring clear communication between the COA and the institution and protecting the review process from misinterpretation or inconsistent application.
- Restrict engagement in institutional processes and activities to advice concerning COA matters—the COA staff representative is not to serve as a private consultant in developing materials, policies, or accreditation documents.
- Be free from conflicts of interest for institutions to which the CSR is assigned.
Private Consultant:

A private consultant can provide further assistance to institutions in understanding and achieving accreditation requirements, developing substantive change proposals, building and organizing thorough documentation, and understanding best practices in higher education. The private consultant can mentor institutional staff members on appropriate professional performance, teach processes, such as assessment and planning, and identify solutions to problems that are common to emerging schools. An effective accreditation consultant should be like a scaffold used in constructing a building, then removed when construction is complete, with the ultimate goal of making the institution more effective and worthy of the recognition of accreditation.

The COA provides the following guidelines to ensure that a school's partnership with an accreditation consultant is appropriate.

- A school using an accreditation consultant should be candid as to the role played by a private consultant in preparation of COA materials (advisor, trainer, document editor, writer, evaluator, etc.).
- Institutions that wish to have COA staff disclose information to a private consultant should make that known in writing. Such a disclosure release will be in effect until revoked by the institution.
- Institutions should provide consultants with all pertinent COA communications regarding progress to achieve maximum benefit from consultation services. These may include staff consultation reports, evaluation team reports, and COA action letters, depending on the scope of service provided by the consultant.
- The institution may elect to have a private consultant present for consultation meetings with a COA staff representative. The purpose of the consultant's presence is exclusively to assist the institution in understanding comments and questions and subsequently achieving the desired quality improvement. The consultant is not authorized to speak on behalf of the institution or to answer questions posed to institutional personnel. Private consultants may not be present for evaluation team visit meetings or Commission meetings and debriefs.
- The relationship between an institution and consultant should be marked by professionalism and integrity. Terms of service should be mutually understood and fulfilled. Neither party should misrepresent the institution.
- Under no circumstances does the responsibility for complying with ABHE Standards, policies, or procedures transfer from the institution to the consultant. It is the institution's obligation to satisfy COA requirements.

Adopted February 2015; Revised February 2023
Policies Providing General Institutional Guidance
Policy on Closing an Institution

Preparing the Way

A decision to close an educational institution requires thoughtful planning and careful consultation with all affected constituencies. Every effort should be devoted to informing each constituency as fully as possible about the conditions requiring consideration of a decision of such importance, and all available information should be shared. Before closing, such alternatives as merging with another institution, forming a consortium, or participating in extensive inter-institutional sharing and cooperation should be carefully considered. As much as possible, the determination to close rests with the board of control.

Tradition and sentiment are important considerations, but sentimentality should not be allowed to determine events. A decision to close should never be made or reversed simply on the basis of fear, hopes, or aspirations that have little relation to reality. Neither should a decision be delayed to the point where the institution has lost its viability and its educational program no longer retains quality and integrity. Since the immediate interests of current students and faculty are most directly affected, their present and future prospects require especially sensitive attention and involvement.

It is assumed that closing an institution means a decision to permanently discontinue its educational activities, not merely to suspend them for an indefinite period in the hope that circumstances may someday permit their resumption. But it should be noted that most institutions of higher education are corporations established under the provisions of state or provincial law, and, as such, may have legal responsibilities (e.g., holding title to real property) that may necessitate the continued existence of the corporation after the educational activities of the institution have been terminated. Indeed, it is probable that such continued corporate existence, at least for a time, will prove to be the usual situation. It is unlikely that in most cases, corporate existence and educational activities can be terminated simultaneously.

Closing an Institution

A decision to close requires specific plans for providing in appropriate ways for students, faculty, administrative and support staff, and the disposition of the institution’s assets. Many considerations bear upon closing an educational institution and each situation will be unique. Public institutions, seminaries, church-related institutions—the nature and sponsorship of each institution requires different emphases and poses particular conditions to be met in reaching and carrying out the decision. Nevertheless, general guidelines may be helpful to each institution considering closing.

This statement makes only incidental reference to such corporate responsibilities and always in the educational context. It is imperative, therefore, that a board of control considering institutional closure should be guided by these guidelines, by state or provincial educational authorities, and by the advice of legal counsel. Special counsel to advise with respect to
problems of closing may be desirable for the institution. Institutional and specialized accrediting bodies should also be consulted and be kept fully apprised of developments.

1. **Students.** Students who have not completed their degrees should be provided for according to their academic needs. Arrangements for transfer to other institutions will require complete academic records and all other related information gathered in files that can be transmitted promptly to receiving institutions. Agreements made with other institutions to receive transferring students and to accept their records should be in writing. Should it be necessary for an institution to cease operations, any teach-out agreements with other institutions must be submitted to ABHE for approval. To be approved, teach-out agreements must be made with institutions that are accredited by a USDE-recognized agency. Such an agreement must ensure compatibility in content, quality, and calendar between the program of instruction offered by the closing institution and the program to be completed at the receiving institution. The closing institution should seek to make its teach-out arrangements with institutions in the proximate geographical area. Further, instruction to complete the term must be provided at no additional cost to the student. Where financial aid is concerned, particularly federal or state grants, arrangements should be made with the appropriate agencies to transfer the grants to the receiving institutions. Where such arrangements cannot be completed, students should be fully informed. In cases where students have held institutional scholarships or grants and where there are available funds that can be legally used to support students while they complete degrees at other institutions, appropriate agreements should be negotiated. (ABHE will cooperate with USDE and the relevant state(s)/province(s) to minimize the negative impact of the closure for students.)

2. **Academic records and financial aid transcripts.** All academic, financial aid information, and other records should be prepared for permanent filing. Arrangements should be made with the state or provincial department of higher education or other appropriate agency for filing of student records. If there is no state or provincial educational agency that can receive records, arrangements should be made with another institution or university or with the state or provincial archives to preserve the records. Notification should be sent to every current and past student indicating where the records are being stored and what the accessibility of those records will be. Where possible, a copy of a student’s record should also be forwarded to the individual student.

3. **Completion of institutional obligations.** When a student chooses to continue at another institution but is within 18 months of completing an academic degree in the closing institution, arrangements may be made to permit that student to complete the requirements for a degree elsewhere but to receive it from the closed institution. This may require special action by the appropriate state or provincial agency. Such arrangements should also include provisions for continuing the institution’s accreditation only for this purpose by the accrediting agency involved. These steps normally require the institution to continue as a legal corporate entity for 12 to 18 months beyond the
closing date, but any such arrangement must be established in careful consultation with the appropriate authorities and with their written consent.

Provision for Faculty and Staff

In every possible case, the institution should arrange for continuation of those faculty and staff who will be necessary for the completion of the institution’s work up to the closing date. When faculty and staff are no longer needed, the institution should make every effort to assist them in finding alternative employment. It should be understood that the institution can make no guarantees, but genuinely good faith efforts to assist in relocation and reassignment are essential. In the event that faculty or staff members find new positions, early resignations should be accepted.

The Final Determination

Determinations must be made to allocate whatever financial resources and assets remain after the basic needs of current students, faculty, and staff are provided. When the financial resources of the institution are inadequate to honor commitments, the board should investigate possible alternatives and protective measures available under applicable bankruptcy laws before deciding to close. If funds are insufficient to maintain normal operations through the end of the closing process, the institution should not overlook the possibility of soliciting one-time gifts and donations to assist in fulfilling its final obligations.

Every effort should be made to develop publicly-defensible policies for dividing the resources equitably among those with claims against the institution. One of the best ways to achieve this goal is to involve potential claimants in the process of developing the policies. Time and effort devoted to carrying the process to a judicious conclusion may considerably reduce the likelihood of lawsuits or other forms of confrontation.

It is impossible to anticipate in advance the many claims that might be made against remaining resources of an institution, but the following three principles may be helpful to set priorities:

1. Students have the right to expect basic minimal services during the final semester, not only in the academic division but also in the business office, financial aid office, registrar’s office, counseling, and other essential support services. Staff should be retained long enough to provide these services. It may be appropriate to offer special incentives to keep key personnel present.

2. Reasonable notice and explanation is given to all employees regarding the possibility of early termination of contracts. The reason for retaining some personnel longer than others should be based on the satisfaction of the minimal needs of students and the legal requirements for closing.
3. Every effort should be made to honor long-term financial obligations (loans, debentures, etc.) even though the parties holding such claims may choose not to press them.

The Closing Date

The board of trustees should take a formal vote to terminate the institution on a specified date. That date will depend on a number of factors including the decision to file or not to file for bankruptcy. Another key factor is whether or not all obligations to students will have been satisfactorily discharged. This is particularly important if the decision is made to allow seniors in their final year to graduate from the institution by completing their degree requirements elsewhere. If such arrangements are made, the board must be sure to take the legal action necessary to permit the awarding of degrees after the institution otherwise ceases to function. Normally, formal vote to award a degree is made after all requirements have been met, but it is legally possible to make arrangements for a student to complete the requirements for a degree at another institution and to receive the degree from the closed institution. These requirements must be clearly specified along with a deadline for completion. Also, the board must identify the person or persons authorized to determine whether or not these requirements have in fact been satisfied. Arrangements must be completed with the appropriate state and accrediting agencies in advance in order to assure that the degree is awarded by a legally authorized and accredited institution.

Disposition of Assets

In the case of a not-for-profit institution, the legal requirements of the state or provincial and, if applicable, federal government must be carefully examined with respect to the disposition of institutional assets. Arrangements for the sale of the physical plant, equipment, library, special collections, art, or other funds must be explored with legal counsel. In the case of wills, endowments, or special grants, the institution should, as much as possible, honor the wishes of donors, grantors, executors of estates, and other providers of special funds. State or provincial laws regarding the disposition of funds from a nonprofit institution must be meticulously followed.

All concerned state or provincial and, if applicable, federal agencies need to be apprised of the institution’s situation, and any obligations related to estate or, if applicable, federal funds need to be cleared with the proper agencies.

Other Considerations

The institution should establish a clear understanding with its creditors and all other agencies involved with its activities to assure that their claims and interests will not be subject to later legal proceedings that might jeopardize the records or status of its students or faculty.
Conclusion

The closing of an educational institution is never a happy event. Nevertheless, such action can be rendered less traumatic by careful attention to details of the legal and moral obligations of the institution. Closing will be marked by sadness, but well-planned and conscientious efforts to assure that the institution’s students, faculty, and staff will be optimally provided for and that assets will be used in ways that will honor the intentions of the original donors, should help in avoiding bitterness and rancor. A final report on the closing should be submitted to the appropriate accrediting and state or provincial agencies for their records.

NOTE: The most recent comprehensive reference work, which includes summaries of state regulations regarding disposition of records and dissolution of nonprofit institutions and universities, is the following:


Policy on Conferral of Honorary Doctoral Degrees

The practice of awarding honorary degrees on worthy candidates can be a means of appropriate recognition for outstanding service if done wisely and selectively.

The following guidelines should be observed by those ABHE-member institutions that choose to confer honorary degrees:

1. The institution will secure appropriate approval prior to offering honorary degrees, if required by the state or province in which the institution is located.

2. The number of honorary degrees conferred in any given year should be limited, usually no more than two.

3. Candidates for honorary degrees ought to be limited to those whose life and service record has been demonstrated to be of particularly outstanding merit exemplifying the institution’s mission and goals over a lengthy period of time, usually over several decades.

4. Honorary degrees ordinarily should not be conferred on any active trustee, administrator, faculty, or staff member.

5. Honorary degrees ordinarily should not be awarded to former trustees, administrators, faculty, or staff members until at least six months has elapsed after their association with the institution.

6. The degree nomenclature used ordinarily should be such as is normally understood as an honorary nature. For example:

   The Doctor of Divinity *(honoris causa)* or D.D. might be conferred for outstanding lengthy service in some avenue of Christian ministry involving gospel proclamation. The Doctor of Letters *(honoris causa)* or D.Litt. might be conferred for outstanding lengthy service in some avenue of literary ministry. The Doctor of Civil Law *(honoris causa)* or D.C.L. might be conferred for outstanding lengthy service in some avenue of community service ministry.

7. Candidates for honorary degrees must be approved by the board of trustees, as is required of regular degree candidates of the institution.

8. Both the recipient and the conferring institution should be honored in the granting of a degree *(honoris causa)*.

Adopted February 1994
Policy on Ethical Practices

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 emphasize biblical and theological studies as well 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 executive 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, 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 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 institution should attempt to verify the status of a student’s withdrawal before the application is accepted, and if the withdrawal is dishonorable, the receiving institution will consider the action(s) that resulted in withdrawal as well as the current life circumstances of that student. 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:** Each 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, candidate, or applicant level. 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. **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,” “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 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. 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 program-credit students from noncredit 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 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 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 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 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 biological sex, race, disability or national origin. This fact will be stated in the catalog and other relevant literature. Institutions that participate in Title IV HEA programs are referred to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights for the appropriate statements. Ecclesiastical and theological considerations may be applied with regard to gender roles.

15. **Discontinuation of an academic program.** 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 incoming students 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.
Policy on Governance

The process of governance is a vital element of biblical higher education. As every institution is to have a governing board, it is essential that individual leaders of that board be free from experiencing or exerting undue influence and control, and that the board effectively be engaged in the governance of the institution.

Part of the process of protecting the overall board and its individual members involves ensuring that conflicts of interests are identified and avoided.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Each governing board needs to develop its own conflict of interest policy which adheres to regional or local legal requirements. The following list is provided as guidance for creating an environment free from conflicts of interest.

1. The governing board should be of sufficient size (minimum of 5) and diversity of experience and professional competency so as to avoid a small group of people controlling the organization or the reliance on directors with limited breadth and resources to support a complex educational institution.

2. Board members should not be employees of the institution or function in a volunteer capacity that would create the perception of serving as an employee of the institution. For example, a board member teaching an occasional course would not be a conflict of interest, but a board member teaching a half-time load every semester would. Caution should be applied in assessing the public perception that a board member is engaged in the day-to-day business of the institution.

3. Board members should not be subordinate to another board member or an employee of the institution.

4. Institutions should establish limits concerning arms-length relationships for board members, such as exclusions for a spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandparent, or grandchild, either by blood or marriage, of an employee or another board member of the institution, consistent with CCCC or ECFA guidelines.

5. Board members should not receive significant remuneration, directly or indirectly (outside of reimbursement for incurred expenses) from the institution for extra work performed in its behalf. Benefits received by family members related to work performed by the board member would be an indirect benefit.

6. Businesses or vendors with which board members have a formal relationship (owner, partner, family member of owner, etc.) should not generate a profit or other substantial benefit from services rendered to the institution or be given preference in the consideration of contract awards.
7. Board members should be free from any relationship that the individual member or the board as a whole believes compromises the impartiality in making conflict-free decisions.

**Board Engagement and Organization**

1. The governing board should have a minimum of two meetings per year at which a broad range of issues related to governance is discussed (i.e., meeting not limited to a specific topic or action).

2. A quorum for voting board members should be defined by bylaws and consistent with regional or local law.

3. Minutes of each meeting should accurately reflect all decisions made by the governing board.

4. Board members who are not regularly engaged in institutional governance should be reviewed and removed from voting membership if not re-engaged in a timely fashion.

5. Non-voting board members (ex officio or advisory) should not exceed the number of voting board members to ensure the board’s focus on active governance.

6. Board terms of service should ensure continuity and provide opportunity for adding new members to the board. Not more than thirty-three percent (33%) of the board should rotate off in any 12-month period, and board terms should be at least three years in length.

7. While a sponsoring organization may appoint board members if such a provision is specified in the enabling documents, not more than thirty-three percent (33%) of the board should be subject to appointment in any 12-month period.

8. A sponsoring organization or the public does not have the right to review the voting record of individual board members unless specified otherwise in enabling documents. Decisions of the board are collective and should represent the board as a whole. The institution should have protocols in place for questions about board actions that protect individual board members from media and other inquiries.

9. Church membership or denominational affiliation is not regarded as a conflict in serving as a public member on a governing board, but an individual in a leadership position in a sponsoring church or parent organization/denomination would not be considered a public member. An institution that is a subsidiary of a parent organization must include public members on the governing board.

*Institutions are encouraged to adopt the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (www.cccc.org) or the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (www.ecfa.org), which were consulted in the development of these ABHE guidelines. Both organizations offer institutions the opportunity for certification under their Standards of Accountability.*

Adopted February 2018
Policy on State/Government Authorization

An institution is expected to have authorization to award the credentials and provide the education it offers in all the jurisdictions in which it operates (Std. 4, EE 2). The authorization to operate can vary in different jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions will allow operation without registration due to “religious exemption” while others will expect formal registration and/or approval. As such, an institution must seek approval from the governing agency to operate in each specific jurisdiction where authorization is required before offering programs or credit courses. These expectations are not contingent upon federal regulations concerning state authorization (WCET.wiche.edu/focus-areas/policy-and-regulation/state-authorization/history) and, as such, are not influenced by federal law alone or limited to U.S. states or U.S. territories. They also reflect the ethical obligation of an institution of biblical higher education to satisfy legal requirements where applicable.

Each state or country defines operation or presence differently. Authorization may be required when a student lives in a state and is taking either face-to-face or electronically mediated courses (e.g., online or broadcast). Authorization may also be required if the institution advertises in local media; participates in college fairs; employs faculty, facilitators, mentors, marketers, or recruiters living in the jurisdiction; or engages in field-based learning in the jurisdiction. Consequently, the following procedures should be followed to ensure that appropriate authorization is secured.

1. For distance (online), hybrid, or face-to-face courses offered to students living in U.S. states/territories or Canadian provinces other than that of the main campus, the institution must secure written documentation that demonstrates that it has authorization or exemption from registration to offer credit classes or credentials in each U.S. state or territory or Canadian province in which it enrolls students in such courses.
   a. If an institution believes that a statutory rule provides for a “religious” or “other” exemption to operate, it is the responsibility of the institution to provide evidence from that statute or regulatory agency verifying that the exemption does indeed extend to the institution and all programs offered by the institution in the jurisdiction.
   b. Due to the changing nature of state or provincial regulations, the institution should be able to verify that its permission/authorization is current.
   c. If an institution does not qualify for a religious exemption, it must demonstrate in writing that it is legally permitted to operate in each state, territory, or province in which it holds credit classes and/or offers credentials.

2. For institutions that maintain a physical campus (i.e., an extension site, an additional location, or a branch campus) outside of the United States or Canada, documenting authorization to operate and deliver programs offered by the institution in that jurisdiction is required. If authorization to operate and deliver programs offered by the institution in that jurisdiction is not available for institutions engaged in religious education, written documentation that the institution holds standing and significant support from the local
community, a religious community within the region, or another respected entity in the region is required. If the institution is a Title IV recipient, the institution must still fulfill all Title IV requirements. The institution is required to furnish the COA with contact information for the government or quality assurance entity that authorizes offerings whenever a location is established in a foreign country. The COA will inform this entity of any accreditation decisions relating to the in-country program.

3. An institution which is an active member of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) will be considered to satisfy state authorization in states currently participating in the reciprocity agreement. It is important to note, however, that institutions are not automatically extended coverage by SARA; consequently, an institution must retain evidence that it has been authorized by SARA. See nc-sara.org.

4. NC-Sara provides a list of regulations required by agencies in each U.S. state which may be helpful to institutions pursuing authorization state-by-state. It is important to note that some states may have more than one agency from which to seek approval/authorization. See https://nc-sara.org/guide/state-authorization-guide.

Adopted February 2018; Revised February 2020
Policy on Semi-Autonomous Institutions

Policy

The Commission on Accreditation (COA) recognizes a variety of patterns regarding institution sponsorship and organizational structure. These include sponsorships that may range from a local church at one end of the spectrum to a for-profit organization at the other.

Required Qualities

The COA desires institutional stability and educational excellence for all institutions. All institutions, including institutions sponsored by another organization, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, is expected to satisfy the Principle for Accreditation. However, the following institutional qualities are also expected of an institution sponsored by another organization:

Organization and administration:

1. **Board of control.** Institutions sponsored by another organization should have a separate charter and governing board from that of the sponsoring organization. There may be representatives from the board or stakeholders of the sponsoring organization on the institutional board. However, its board must include others from a broader pool of persons than the sponsoring organization alone. The governing board must give its full attention to institutional matters.

2. **President.** The institutional president must have knowledge of biblical higher education. Should he/she also serve as a chief officer in the sponsoring organization, the president’s schedule must either reflect an adequate amount of time to fulfill the obligations of an institutional president’s role or a substantial administrative structure, comprised of qualified personnel, must be in place to provide for continuity and stability in the chief administrative function.

3. **Administration.** The institution must have administrators such as a chief academic officer, a chief student-personnel officer, a chief financial officer, and a librarian adequate to serve the needs of the Institution. If these individuals are also qualified to provide instruction, their teaching loads must be limited so that they can adequately fulfill their administrative responsibilities.

4. **Development and public relations.** The institution’s development and public relations activities should be conducted in such a way as to maximize the effectiveness of efforts in the areas of student recruitment, public relations, and fund raising.

5. **Finance.** The institution must separately document the finances of the educational institution from that of the parent organization. To this end, the following are to be provided along with the audited financial statements:
• a schedule listing the revenues and expenses specific to the educational institution; and
• either a report documenting the assets and liabilities specific to the educational institution, or,
• where assets and/or resources are intermingled, signed agreements documenting that the educational institution has, and will continue to have, access to the resources needed toward the ongoing fulfillment of its mission.

Institutional Community:

1. **Community Life.** The institution should establish a community with an identity separate from that of the sponsoring organization. Students should feel that they are attending an institution of higher education, not participating in an activity of a local church or business operation.

2. **Faculty.** A majority of the teaching must be accomplished by a faculty that receives compensation from the institution commensurate with their responsibilities. Faculty members must possess qualifications appropriate to their instructional responsibilities. The diversity of personnel available should be adequate to support the institution's curriculum.

3. **Faculty Decision-Making.** Faculty must be regarded as a responsible body that actively participates in the establishment of the institution's objectives and curricular programs.

4. **Library.** Library holdings must belong to the institution of higher education, not the sponsoring organization. The library collection must adequately support the institution's curriculum.

Adopted May 2007; Revised June 2017, December 2022
Policy on Exceptions due to a Regional Crisis or Pandemic

The ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) established the following protocols for rapid response in circumstances where federal, state/provincial, or local restrictions due to a crisis or pandemic make it impossible for normal institutional operations and/or accreditation functions to continue without temporary exceptions.

The COA authorizes the COA Executive Director or Director’s designee to grant exceptions to accreditation policies and procedures as noted below on an act-and-inform basis. Such exceptions must comply with applicable laws and regulatory provisions in the jurisdiction(s) impacted by the crisis. Exceptions must also comply with any directives from the U.S. Department of Education and/or state/provincial education offices. Exceptions will be reported to the respective COA subcommittee (APCAN or PRSC) at the next scheduled meeting. The COA may elect to continue, modify, or rescind temporary provisions as it deems appropriate.

The COA recognizes the following alternatives for consideration. Other options may be approved by the COA Executive Director or Director’s designee where consistent with regulatory requirements:
1. Temporarily offering all courses via distance education (online) even if the institution has not been approved to offer 50% or more of a program via distance education.
2. Temporarily suspending classes or providing out-of-class learning activities as a substitute for in-class learning activities.
3. Temporarily shifting to competency-based education assignments.
4. Temporarily suspending or waiving ministry formation, chapel, field education, or other requirements that would normally involve close contact engagement with others or travel.
5. Temporarily switching to pass/fail grading.
6. Temporarily suspending student services where circumstances prevent reasonable access to or engagement with such services.
7. Temporarily suspending meetings of decision-making bodies (faculty, administration, board) or moving such meetings to virtual formats.

The institution must contact the COA office at coa@abhe.org to initiate an exception, provide a brief explanation for how educational quality will be sustained under the exception, secure COA Executive Director or Director’s designee approval of the exception, and keep the COA office informed of the anticipated or actual start and end date for the exception. Where emergency action must be taken, the institution should contact the COA office as soon as possible.

The COA Executive Director or Director’s designee may also make adjustments to accreditation procedures as long as those exceptions are consistent with regulatory guidance in effect at the time of the decision. These are not limited to, but may include the following:
1. Conduct virtual evaluation team visits with a follow-up on-site visit at a later date to verify items that could not be examined virtually.
2. Delay evaluation team visits when a virtual visit is not possible (up to 7 months).
3. Delay or conduct virtual Commission staff visits.
On-site visits supplementing a virtual team visit may be conducted by a team evaluator or Commission staff representative up to one year after the team visit unless extended by COA action. Such visits will normally involve a few hours on campus during a single day. The on-site visit will include review of physical and technological resources, faculty records, records of student complaints/grievance, and items identified by the off-site team that could not be examined virtually. Usually, one evaluator will conduct the on-site visit; however, additional evaluators may be needed where additional issues need explored. The on-site evaluator(s) will prepare a brief summary report of findings, which the COA staff will provide to the institution for response and to the COA for review. The report and any institutional response will be reviewed at the next scheduled meeting of the COA and may be separate from action taken on the virtual evaluation visit team report and the institution’s response to the virtual evaluation visit report.

The COA may make exceptions in its actions consistent with regulatory guidance at the time of the action, including the following:

1. Delaying action on candidate status, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or sanction for up to one year.
2. Granting retroactive approval for candidate status, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or sanction based on the original timeline for review had the crisis not disrupted that timeline.
3. Taking action on candidate status, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or sanction at an electronic meeting.
4. Taking action on candidate status, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or sanction at a meeting during the year other than the normal February review cycle.
5. Delaying an evaluation team visit for more than 7 months.

Exceptions due to regional crisis or pandemic are temporary in nature and may not be extended beyond one year without special approval by the COA. Institutions that wish to make a temporary exception permanent must follow the applicable procedures in the Policy on Substantive Change and/or related policies in the COA Manual. Such changes should be pursued before regional or national circumstances render the exception no longer applicable as a temporary measure.

Adopted November 2020
Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses

Collaborative agreements in sharing electronically delivered online courses are a tremendous benefit to many schools. It allows schools to begin offering online courses without the need to develop their own technical structure, and it enables schools to provide a few courses for a few students without significant financial drain. ABHE does not wish to discourage this approach; however, ABHE does want to provide some guidelines that should be helpful when a school enters into an agreement with a provider of online courses/programs. In this document, school will refer to the institution that places their students in a provider’s courses or programs; provider will refer to the institution or company that provides the courses or programs.

The issue of importance relates to meeting all the appropriate accreditation requirements (Comprehensive/Programmatic Standards and Policies). All institutions offering online courses, including those that outsource through some form of collaborative agreement, are ultimately responsible for the education and for meeting accreditation standards related to the online courses. The following items should be considered:

1. Has the provider formally adopted, and do they comply with, the Best Practices in Online Distance Education?

2. Has the provider formally adopted, and do they comply with, an accepted standard for quality online courses? (An example would be the Quality Matters: Quality Assurance in Online Learning standard.)

3. Does the provider comply with the ABHE Policy on Alternative Academic Patterns?

Consider, for example, these statements from the COA Manual:

- The qualifications of alternative academic pattern faculty must be commensurate with those of on-campus faculty.
  
  Note: Schools must be able to document that those who teach the online classes their students are in have appropriate academic credentials. Schools using a provider of online courses should have access to transcripts of all persons who teach their students.

- Faculty involved in the development and implementation of offerings using alternative academic patterns are provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness.
  
  Note: Schools should be able to document the type, quality, and extent of the training and support given to all online instructors at providing institutions/companies. It is an advantage to have someone from the school go through the provider’s training for firsthand experience. Copies of provider faculty surveys may also be helpful in demonstrating compliance with the policy requirements.
• Alternative academic pattern courses must be systematically evaluated to determine if course objectives are being met. Records that deal with academic and other matters must be maintained and safeguarded by the parent institution.

  Note: Schools should request assessment reports from the provider of online courses demonstrating how courses are being evaluated and how improvement is being made based on the assessment. Data from provider’s courses must be included in the overall assessment of the school. Schools may wish to request a copy of the provider’s assessment plan as a resource document.

• Adequate student support services, such as admissions, financial aid, academic and personal counseling, registration, and oversight must be provided for in alternative academic patterns. The security of personal information is protected.

  Note: Schools should be able to document both their own services to students and the services offered by the providers. This is especially important as it relates to technical support and support after normal business hours and on weekends. Student satisfaction surveys collected by the school or the provider are critical documentation.

• Personnel providing services to students employing alternative academic patterns are provided appropriate support and training to ensure their effectiveness in meeting student needs.

  Note: Schools should be able to document how the personnel providing service to online students are trained and supported regarding their involvement with students. This should include both the school and provider.

• Qualified faculty and adequate instructional and technical support, facilities, supplies, library, and other resources that support the classes taken must be provided in alternative academic patterns.

  Note: Schools must provide, or have provided, support, technology services, and library/research resources that are adequate to accomplish appropriate research at a level comparable to students in traditional programs. Schools should gather information regarding how the resources are being used. Library resources should include access to a college library with electronic access to available books and a process for receiving and returning books. It should also include access to digital books, journal articles (full-text), and other tools that can be used.

• Institutions will utilize the Best Practices in Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs developed by the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET).

  Note: Schools, along with the provider, should be familiar with the Best Practices document and operate according to it.

4. Can the school substantiate that the Comprehensive Standards/Programmatic Standards as they relate to the Best Practices document are being met both by the school and the provider?
5. Has the provider formally adopted the ABHE Tenets of Faith?

6. If the provider is an education institution, is it accredited by a recognized accrediting association (CHEA and USDE approved)? If appropriate, is the provider approved by the State Department of Education? Has its online program been evaluated and approved?

   Note: If the provider is an education institution, the school should request a copy of their most recent self-study, team reports, responses to the reports, and the letter granting or reaffirming accreditation. If follow-up reports are required, the school should request copies of these and all subsequent actions of the accrediting association. These items should become part of the school’s documentation and resource collection and should be included in the self-study and site team evaluation as related to the online program. Documentation should include any actions from the State Department of Education.

7. Schools should maintain copies of the course syllabi for every class their students take from a provider where the class is directly transcripted by the school. The syllabi should include instructor information, course description, textbooks, learning objectives, policies, evaluation requirements, and schedule.

8. When a school is preparing for a site visit, the school should consult with the Site Team Chair concerning what records from the provider the Team will want to review. For instance, the school might provide the Team Chair with a list of all classes that were outsourced and then ask which faculty files the team would like to review. The school must make certain all the appropriate documentation is available.

   Note: Schools going through a site visit may wish to have a representative from the provider available to answer specific questions related to the provided classes.

9. Schools considering using a provider for electronically delivered classes should research carefully the various options and request recommendations. Schools must be careful that the costs related to outsourcing classes does not negatively impact the school. Financial integrity in dealing with a provider and students is imperative.

10. When using a provider for electronically delivered courses, the school and the provider should carefully examine what is required by the Comprehensive/Programmatic Standards and policies to ensure that they are being met for all classes.

   Note: Schools may wish to have a representative from the provider available to answer specific questions related to all the items listed above during the self-study process.

Adopted March 2007
Guidelines for Ensuring Integrity in Distance Education and Correspondence Studies

ABHE requires that institutions take appropriate steps to ensure that every student who registers for distance education or correspondence education course or program credits is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. Institutions will have written policies governing measures undertaken to verify the identity of a student who participates in class or course work offered via distance education and correspondence studies. ABHE, in evaluating an institution offering distance education and/or correspondence education, will verify that the institution has a written policy governing this process and that the policy is being effectively implemented.

The following methods are suggested as measures that institutions may take, at their option, to ensure the required level of integrity. Ordinarily, a combination of the methods identified below will be utilized:

1. Authenticate the student through a secure login and pass code.
2. Require major exams to be proctored by a responsible party who, as part of the proctoring process, verifies the identity of the student and certifies in writing that the examination was taken under the conditions required by the course.
3. Validate the student’s identity via a government issued photo ID.
4. Conduct random interviews of a sampling of distance education students at some point during a course, asking focused questions about course content and student-generated products to verify the student’s knowledge of course materials.
5. Employ available software applications and services to ensure that student-produced materials are not plagiarized (e.g., turnitin.com)
6. Require students to sign an “academic honesty” statement at the end of the course, asserting that the work done for the course has been their own. The signature will be a necessary requirement for passing the course. Students must be notified of this requirement at the outset of the course.
7. Employ new or other technologies and practices that prove effective in verifying student identity.

In efforts to ensure integrity, institutions must use processes that protect student privacy. They must also notify students of any projected additional student financial charges associated with the verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.

Adopted April 2010
Guidelines for Doctoral Programs

ABHE’s accrediting function is recognized by the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education. Within the Council, ABHE is one of eight member accrediting bodies that offer international accreditation services. All of the Council members assume responsibility for the oversight of graduate education and nearly all members accredit institutions that provide doctoral level education, especially theologically-based doctoral education. The COA has endorsed the benchmarks identified in the material below. ABHE-accredited institutions are encouraged to consider the benchmarks and use them for guidance in evaluating any doctoral-level studies that they either currently offer or anticipate offering in the near future.

The Beirut Benchmarks

Developed and unanimously endorsed by participants in the ICETE Doctoral Consultation
Beirut, Lebanon
March 2010

Doctoral study within an evangelical Christian institution is founded on an understanding of knowledge that is more than academic. In the Bible, acquiring and exercising wisdom involves a combination of faith, reason and action. It requires:

- right belief and committed trust in the living God (“the fear of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom”).
- creative and humble use of the rationality God has granted to humans made in his own image.
- appropriate living in the world to reflect God’s calling and participate in God’s mission.

Doctoral study, therefore, pursued on such a foundation, will be confessional, rational and missional. For a Christian, doctoral study is one dimension of what it means to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.”

Within such a framework of Christian identity and commitment, the doctoral qualification will be awarded to students who are church members commended for faithful discipleship and recognized leadership, and who demonstrate the following qualities through appropriate examination:

1. **Comprehensive understanding**, having demonstrated a breadth of systematic understanding of a field of study relevant to the Christian community of faith, and mastery of the skills and methods of research appropriate to that field.

2. **Critical skills, faithfully exercised**, having demonstrated their capacity for critical analysis, independent evaluation of primary and secondary source materials, and synthesis of new and inter-related ideas through coherent argumentation, and their commitment to exercise such skills on the foundation of biblical faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his church.
3. **Serious inquiry with integrity**, having demonstrated the ability to conceive, design and implement a substantial project of inquiry resulting in a sustained and coherent thesis, and to do so with Christian and scholarly integrity.

4. **Creative and original contribution**, having produced, as a result of such disciplined inquiry, a creative and original contribution that extends the frontiers of knowledge, or develops fresh insights in the articulation and contextual relevance of the Christian tradition, some of which merit national or international refereed publication.

5. **Contextual relevance**, having shown their capacity, in the course of their doctoral program and in their expectation of its future potential, for biblically-informed critical engagement with the realities of their cultural contexts.

6. **Ability to communicate**, having shown an ability in communicating about their area of expertise to peer-level academic audiences, and, where appropriate, to non-specialists in local Christian communities and the wider society in culturally relevant ways, including their mother tongue, for example through teaching, preaching or writing.

7. **Missional impact**, having shown that they are committed, and can be expected, to use the fruit of their doctoral study, the skills it has given them and the opportunities it affords them, to promote the kingdom of God and advance the mission of the church (both local and global), through Christ-like and transformational service, to the glory of God.

Endorsed by

- Governing Board of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE)
  - Langham Partnership International (LPI)
  - Overseas Council International (OCI)
  - Asia Theological Association (ATA)
- Association for Evangelical Theological Education in Latin America (AETAL)
  - Euro-AsianAccrediting Association (E-AAA)
- South Pacific Association of Evangelical Colleges (SPAEC)
  - Association for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)
- Commission on Accreditation, Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)
Constitution and Bylaws
Association for Biblical Higher Education
In
Canada and the United States

Constitution

Article I — Name

The name of this organization shall be the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) in Canada and the United States.

Article II — Mission

ABHE exists to advance biblical higher education for Kingdom impact.

1.1. Articulating biblical higher education’s distinctives and communicating the excellence and effectiveness of its members to internal and external stakeholders, including prospective students and parents, donors, students, alumni, faculty, the higher education community, the church, governmental and regulatory entities, and society.

1.2. Supporting the work of a separate and independent Commission on Accreditation (COA) to assure quality and integrity among biblical higher education institutions and programs through accreditation standards and peer review processes. (Hereafter in the Constitution and Bylaws, the term institution shall be understood to apply also to qualified educational units or programs where appropriate.

1.3. Providing professional resources and services that exemplify and stimulate excellence.

1.4. Serving as an amplifier and multiplier of member efforts and resources, seeking to foster growth and flourishing that emphasizes Bible engagement and spiritual development in community to help students to answer God's call to live life on mission with Him.

Article III — Tenets of Faith

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, 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.

**Article IV — Association Membership**

Membership in the Association is available subject to the categories and conditions enumerated below. Membership may be extended to:

1.1 Postsecondary institutions which are compatible with the Association’s mission, conform to the Association’s *Tenets of Faith*, and have been granted Accredited or Preaccredited (Candidate) status by the COA (c.f., Article VI).

1.2 Postsecondary institutions which are compatible with the Association’s mission, conform to the Association’s *Tenets of Faith*, and have one or more programs that have been granted Programmatic Accreditation by the COA (c.f., Article VI).

1.3 Postsecondary institutions which are compatible with the Association’s mission, conform to the Association’s *Tenets of Faith*, and are recognized by a Canadian provincial authority or accredited by a USDE- or CHEA-recognized accreditor.

**Article V – Presidential Congress**

The Association’s Presidential Congress will be comprised of the president (i.e., chief executive officer) of each member institution, who serves as the sole institutional representative to this body without proxy. The Presidential Congress shall have the following prerogatives:

1.1. Board Member Election. Board members representing member institutions will be elected by a majority vote of eligible Presidential Congress members, in keeping with terms and conditions specified in Article VI below.

1.2. Constitution/Bylaws Amendments. Amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws will be undertaken by the Presidential Congress subject to provisions of this Constitution (Article IX) and Bylaws (Article VIII).
1.3. Member Institution Committee. The Presidential Congress will designate a membership committee of no less than five (5) of its members to review and act upon institutional applications from non-COA accredited institutions for Association membership. Membership will be granted to such institutions for five (5) years initially and, thereafter, for 10 years. Policies and procedures will ensure institutional compatibility with the Association’s stated tenets of faith, purposes, and distinctives.

Article VI – Board of Directors

The Board of Directors shall be composed of ten (10) member institution representatives elected by association member presidents (c.f., Article IV), a majority of which must represent COA-accredited member institutions (c.f., Article IV, section 1.1), and up to eight (8) public members elected by the board. It shall be responsible to exercise fiduciary, strategic, and generative leadership in pursuit of the Association’s mission; to lead in the advancement and resourcing of the Association’s mission; and to establish policies, parameters, and plans to which the Association President is accountable. The board’s composition shall reflect as fully as possible the Association’s national, theological, ecclesiastical, enrollment, gender, and ethnic diversity.

Section 1. Officers

The Board of Directors shall designate from among its members the following officers: chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. These officers, and any other members so designated by the Board of Directors, shall constitute the Executive Committee. In selecting the executive committee, the Board shall take care to provide for the continuity and stability of the Board and the Association.

Executive committee members are the designated officers of the corporation and serve as the Association’s audit committee.

6.1. Chair. The chair will preside at Board of Directors and Executive Committee meetings. The chair exercises leadership in formulating the Board’s agenda and working with the Association’s chief executive officer to ensure integrity and effectiveness in achieving the Association’s mission, implementing its policies, and serving its constituents.

6.2. Vice Chair. The vice chair will preside in the absence, incapacity, or recusal (i.e., due to conflict of interest) of the Chair and carry out such other responsibilities as may be delegated by the chair.

6.3. Secretary. The secretary shall ensure that minutes of the Board of Directors meetings are accurately recorded, properly approved, appropriately disseminated, and adequately secured.
6.4. Treasurer. The treasurer shall work with the Association’s chief executive, auditor, and financial advisors to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the Association’s financial activities and statements. The treasurer shall report annually to the Association’s membership regarding the Association’s audited financial statements.

Section 2. Terms of office

Members of the Board of Directors elected by member institution presidents shall serve a four-year term and may be elected to a successive four-year term, after which they may not be re-elected for at least 4 years. Board members shall be elected annually according to rotating classes for staggered four-year terms. Board members serving three years of an unexpired term will be deemed to have served a full term. Public members of the Board will be elected by the Board to four-year terms and may serve up to three consecutive terms after which they must rotate off the Board for at least one year.

Section 3. Vacancies

Any vacancies that may occur on the Board of Directors may be filled by vote of the remaining Board members until the next annual election.

Section 4. Qualifications

All members of the Board of Directors elected by member presidents (see above) shall be officially and actively connected with an Association member institution (see Article IV above). Elected Board members whose official connection with an Association member institution is severed may, at the discretion of the Board, continue to serve on the Board until a replacement is elected. Board-appointed public members may not be employed or otherwise unofficially or officially associated with Association member institutions and must otherwise conform to the Association’s Policy on Public Representatives.

Article VII — Commission on Accreditation (COA)

Section 1. Nature and function

A separate and independent COA exercises authority over accreditation Standards, decisions, policies, procedures and peer review processes. Through its Standards and peer review accreditation process, the Commission is responsible to ensure institutional quality and integrity and to serve as a catalyst toward excellence among institutions in accord with the Association’s educational distinctives.

Section 2. Goals

To implement its purpose of accreditation, the COA seeks to fulfill the following goals:
2.1.1 To establish policies and procedures that safeguard the integrity and external recognition of accreditation’s quality assurance peer review processes.

2.1.2 To promulgate to the COA Delegate Assembly accreditation Standards that induce an institution or program to achieve the following objectives:

2.1.2.1 Provide evidence that it has established and documented the adequate and increasingly effective achievement of a soundly conceived educational mission that is clearly understood and supported, serves the cause of Christ, and is consonant with the distinctives of the Association;

2.1.2.2 Provide evidence that it has established and documented the adequacy and increasing effectiveness of structures and procedures for governance and administration to achieve its mission;

2.1.2.3 Provide evidence that its faculty, instructional, and facility resources are adequate and increasingly effective in achieving the institutional mission and producing student learning and development;

2.1.2.4 Provide evidence that has established and documented the appropriateness and increasing effectiveness of curricular content and structures consonant with its mission its and corresponding student learning goals;

2.1.2.5 Provide evidence that it has established and documented appropriate and increasingly effective programs for student admissions, development, and services consistent with its mission and corresponding student learning goals.

2.1.3 To establish a curriculum and develop a program and supporting resources for orienting and training Commissioners and peer evaluators in the implementation of the Commission’s accreditation Standards, policies and procedures.

Article VIII — COA Delegate Assembly

Delegates of COA accredited and preaccredited (candidate) institutions constitute the COA Delegate Assembly which exercises autonomous oversight of all accreditation-related matters. The Bylaws stipulate delegate eligibility and member institution representation criteria.

Section I. Regular meetings

Regular meetings of the COA Delegate Assembly shall be held annually, at a time and place to be determined by the COA. Public notification of all regular meetings shall be made at least 60 days in advance, by announcement at the prior annual meeting or publication in an official print or electronic instrument of the COA. The total of eligible and certified institutional delegates present at a regular meeting shall constitute a quorum.
Section 2. Special meetings

Special meetings may be called by the COA at any time, provided that the purpose of the meeting shall be stated in the notices calling the same. Such notices shall be disseminated at least one month before the date of such meeting. The right of initiative in calling a special session shall be granted each member of the COA. A petition for same, stating the reasons therefore, and signed by official representatives of at least twenty percent of the COA membership may be filed with the COA Chair at any time and shall be considered sufficient reason for such a call, whereupon the COA shall call the special session, setting the time and place.

Section 3. Purposes and Prerogatives

3.1. COA. The COA Delegate Assembly shall elect not less than twelve (12) or more than eighteen (18) COA members to serve 4-year terms of office on a rotating basis, in accordance with corresponding Bylaws.

3.2. Accreditation Standards. The COA Delegate Assembly shall ratify proposals of the COA to establish and/or amend accreditation Standards and related policies, in accordance with corresponding Bylaws.

Article IX — Amendments

Section 1. Substantive amendments

Amendments to this Constitution may be made at any specially called meeting of the Presidents Congress (see article V), provided that the proposed amendment(s) shall be disseminated among the membership 60 days prior to the meeting at which it is to be considered. A quorum shall be defined as member presidents present at a duly called special Presidents Congress meeting, provided that a majority shall represent COA-accredited member institutions. A two-thirds vote of all presidents present shall be necessary for adoption of Constitutional amendments. If COA-accredited institutions do not comprise a majority of a specially called Presidents Congress meeting, joint ratification of amendments by the Presidents Congress and COA Delegate Assembly will be required.

Section 2. Editorial amendments

Editorial amendments, including but not limited to: nomenclature consistency and updates, compositional and grammatical corrections or modifications, clarification of ambiguities, and other amendments intended to ensure the accuracy and consistency of this Constitution without introducing substantive alterations, may be effected on an “act and inform” basis. Such editorial changes will be considered ratified when reported to the membership unless specific action is undertaken by the relevant governing body to declare the proposed amendments substantive, in
which case they will be nullified pending Presidents Congress approval by means of the normal amendment procedures specified above.

**Article X — Dissolution**

The Association for Biblical Higher Education exists as an extension of its member institutions and operates for their primary benefit. All assets of the Association are owned by its membership. In the event of dissolution, after satisfaction of all legal obligations, any remaining assets shall be liquidated and resulting monies distributed pro rata to the membership existent at that time upon the basis of the most recent membership assessment.

* * *
Bylaws

Article I — Board of Directors

Section I. Nomination and election

1.1. **Nomination.** A nominating committee shall be appointed by the Board of Directors and shall submit annually to the membership (c.f., Constitution, Article IV). The Nominating Committee shall actively solicit nominations from the membership and endeavor to ensure that the board’s composition shall reflect as fully as possible the Association’s national, theological, ecclesiastical, enrollment, gender, and ethnic diversity (c.f., Constitution, Article V).

1.2. **Election.** Each member institution (c.f., Constitution, Article IV) president shall have one vote. Nominees receiving a majority of votes from among all member institution presidents’ ballots cast will be elected.

Section 2. Duties

2.1 The Board of Directors is charged with formulating and implementing policies and carrying out the purposes of the Association.

2.2 The Board of Directors shall have the right and authority to represent the Association in all matters.

2.3 The Board of Directors will, with the approval of the Association membership, engage a chief executive officer (president) to serve under its direction in promoting the affairs of the Association and the cause of biblical higher education generally.

Article II — President

Section 1. Selection

1.1. A President shall be engaged by the Board of Directors, subject to ratification by the Association membership, to serve as the Association’s chief executive officer. When the position becomes vacant, the board shall appoint a search committee to develop and disseminate appropriate criteria, solicit and screen nominations, and recommend qualified candidates to the board, which shall, in turn, present one candidate to the Association’s member institutions for ratification by two-thirds majority vote.

1.2. The Board-appointed search committee will develop and disseminate specific candidate criteria in the event of a presidential vacancy. General presidential qualifications shall include evidence of authentic Christian experience and agreement with the Association’s Tenets of Faith, knowledge and experience with
higher education and accreditation processes, evidence of executive leadership ability, and communication skills necessary to represent the Association well at public and governmental levels.

Section 2. Duties

2.1 The President shall serve under the direction of the Board of Directors in promoting the affairs of the Association and the cause of biblical higher education in general.

2.2 The President shall attend the meetings of the board on a nonvoting basis and shall consult with the Board chair and Executive Committee for guidance as necessary between meetings.

2.3 The Board of Directors shall establish and make available to Association member institutions a written position description describing the President’s general and specific duties corresponding to the Association’s mission and goals (c.f., Constitution, Article II).

2.4 The President shall be accountable to the board in terms of written standing policies that delineate executive parameters and priorities.

2.5 The President shall employ and ensure appropriate supervision of all Association staff; ensure appropriate coordination of the work of the Association with the COA; and cooperate with the Commission Director and staff to ensure that the COA maintains its “separate and independent” status in accordance with the requirements of Section 602.14(b) and (c) of U.S. Department of Education Title IV regulations. Specifically, the President is responsible to cooperate with the COA Director to ensure the integrity and independence of COA finances, resources, processes, decisions, and records.

Section 3. Term of Office

3.1 The President serves at the pleasure of the Board. For the sake of stability and continuity, however, the following terms of office are established: initial term – three years; subsequent terms – five years. The Board of Directors shall conduct a formal review of the President’s performance, including solicitation of member feedback, one year prior to term expiration and at other times deemed necessary.

3.2 Any proposed resignation, non-renewal, or termination, either on the part of the board or the President, shall require six-month notice to the other party, except when the board undertakes measures for removal of the President for cause.

3.3 Removal for cause other than financial necessity may involve immediate suspension, with pay, pending the outcome of a fair and reasonable process. Causes for removal may include immorality, deviation from the Association’s Tenets of Faith, incompetence,
insubordination, malfeasance, or financial necessity. A fair and reasonable process shall consist of (1) written notice as to cause of suspension, (2) opportunity to confront any accusers and to provide supporting testimony, (3) opportunity for a hearing by an impartial body of not less than three persons appointed by the Board of Directors, and (4) adequate notice as to the time and place of hearing and adequate time to prepare a defense.

3.4 Temporary vacancies may be filled by an acting or interim chief executive officer at the discretion of the Board of Directors, subject to reporting and ratification by the membership.

Article III — Commission on Accreditation (COA)

Section I. Nomination and Election

1.1. Nomination. A nominating committee shall be appointed by the COA and shall submit to the annual COA Delegate Assembly a slate of two or more names for each Commission elective position (excluding public members who are appointed by the Commission). In cases where an incumbent is eligible to serve an additional term, the nominating committee may choose to nominate only the incumbent. The nominating committee shall ensure that the Commission’s national, theological, ecclesiastical, enrollment, gender, and ethnic diversity shall be in accord with the Policy on the Commission Nominating Committee. Nominations of eligible and willing individuals may also be submitted from the COA Delegate Assembly meeting floor.

1.2. Election. Commissioners, except for public members, shall be elected by COA Delegate Assembly majority. Commission nominees, along with any other eligible persons nominated from the floor, shall be voted upon until a candidate receives a majority vote, which shall constitute an election.

1.3. Terms of Office. Elected commissioners will serve for four-year staggered terms and may succeed themselves for a second term after which they may not be re-elected for four years. Public members of the Commission will serve a four-year term and may succeed themselves for a second term after which they may not be re-appointed for four years.

1.4. Vacancies. Commissioners serving three years of an unexpired term will be deemed to have served a full term. Permanent or temporary vacancies shall be filled in accord with the Policy on the Commission Nominating Committee.

Section 2. Composition

The COA will consist of not less than fourteen (14) or more than twenty-two (22) Commissioners, comprised as follows: twelve (12) to eighteen (18) elected from among COA
accredited institutions, including representation among appropriately qualified administrators and appropriately qualified academicians; and two (2) to four (4) appointed public representatives, one of which may be a student representative from a COA accredited institution and the others not associated with a COA accredited, candidate, or applicant institution. Representatives of COA accredited institutions will constitute not less than 3/4 of total Commissioners. Public members will represent at least 1/7 of the Commission. The total number of Commissioners will be determined by Commission workload and appropriate representation.

Section 3. Organization

3.1 The COA will annually elect the following officers: Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. Incumbent Commission officers may be re-elected within the parameters of an individual’s Commission tenure.

3.2 Each Commissioner will be assigned to one or more standing committees established by the Commission in order to facilitate efficient and thorough disposition of the Commission’s ongoing monitoring, periodic review, and decision-making functions.

3.3 The Chair, in consultation with the Commission professional staff, will develop the Commission’s agenda and will chair meetings of the Commission. The Vice Chair will preside in the absence, incapacity, or recusal (i.e., due to conflict of interest) of the Chair.

3.4 The Commission Chair will appoint the chairs and secretaries of the Commission’s various standing committees.

3.5 The Commission Secretary will serve as secretary for all meetings of the Commission and will be responsible for placing in the custody of the Commission staff the final minutes for all committee and Commission deliberations.

Section 4. Responsibilities

4.1 The COA will have the authority to grant candidate and accredited status, and to reaffirm accreditation. It will also have authority to place institutions on warning or probation, issue show-cause orders, and withdraw applicant, candidate, or accredited status.

4.2 The COA will establish its own budget independently of review or consultation with any other entity or organization. As part of this process, it will establish a schedule of fees related to its accreditation services. The Commission will pay fair market value for its proportionate share of personnel, services, equipment and facilities that it uses jointly with the ABHE membership Association.
4.3 The Commission, through a designated standing committee, will monitor the progress of applicant and candidate institutions and call for special reports and visits. The Commission will act as a whole with respect to any committee recommendations for withdrawal of status.

4.4 The Commission, through a designated standing committee, will study proposals for changes in or additions to the Conditions of Eligibility, Principle of Accreditation, Institutional Accreditation Standards, and Programmatic Accreditation Standards (including Essential Elements), and the Association’s policies and procedures for accreditation. The committee’s recommendations will be forwarded to the Commission as a whole, and then to COA Delegate Assembly for approval.

4.5 The Commission, through a designated standing committee, will monitor the progress of accredited institutions experiencing financial difficulties, call for focused reports and visits, and approve special financial reports. The Commission will act as a whole with respect to any recommendations of the committee for warning, probation, issuance of a show-cause order, or withdrawal of status.

Section 5. Meetings

The COA will meet at least annually. In order to facilitate circumstances where institutions are entitled to have representatives appear before the Commission, a Commission meeting will normally occur immediately prior to the Association Annual Meeting. Committees will normally meet just prior to the meeting of the entire Commission. If necessary, the Commission may also conduct additional electronic meetings in a year. The precise time and place of meetings will be determined by the Commission chair in consultation with the Commission professional staff. Public notification of all regular meetings shall be made at least 60 days in advance, by announcement at the prior annual meeting, or publication on the Association website.

Section 6. Appeals

Appeals concerning certain decisions of the COA may be made by an institution’s chief executive. Such appeals will be processed in accord with the Commission’s Policy and Procedures for Appeals.

Section 7. Director, Commission on Accreditation

The COA will be served by a Director who will exercise primary oversight of and responsibility for COA activities.

The Director’s qualifications shall include extensive experience with higher education accreditation and peer review processes; evidence of authentic Christian experience and agreement with the Association’s Tenets of Faith; evidence of executive administrative ability; evidence of supervisory skills; and written and oral communication skills necessary to formulate
and promulgate Commission standards, policies, and procedures to internal and external publics and peer and governmental agencies which exercise a recognition function.

7.1 Duties

7.1.1 The Director is responsible to ensure compliance with COA directives and resource its separate and independent efforts to develop and implement accreditation standards and processes.

7.1.2 The COA, in consultation with the Association President, shall develop and make available to COA Delegate Assembly member institutions a written position description describing the Director’s general and specific duties corresponding to the COA’s purposes and goals (c.f., Constitution, Article VII).

7.1.3 The Director shall be accountable to the COA for diligently and consistently ensuring that staff, consultants, and peer evaluators conform to the Commission’s Standards, policies, and publications for institutional and peer evaluator guidance.

7.1.4 The Director shall be responsible to employ and ensure appropriate supervision of all Commission staff; facilitate, resource, and coordinate the work of the COA; and maintain the integrity and independence of COA finances, resources, processes, decisions, and records.

7.1.5 The Director shall exercise leadership in working with the COA to develop and implement its annual budget in conformity with applicable Commission policy and procedures.

7.1.6 The COA Director is accountable to the Commission to ensure the Commission’s separate and independent status in keeping with Section 602.14(b) and (c) of U.S. Department of Education regulations.

7.2 Term of office

7.2.1 The Director serves at the pleasure of the Association President and COA. For the sake of stability and continuity, however, the following terms of office are established: initial term—three years; subsequent terms—five years.

7.2.2 The COA will conduct a formal review of the Director’s performance one year prior to term expiration and at other times deemed necessary. The Association President may make recommendations to the COA regarding the Director’s renewal, non-renewal, or developmental goals.
7.2.3 For the sake of stability and continuity, other than for cause, resignation, non-renewal, or termination will normally require 120 days’ notice on the part of either party.

7.2.4 Removal for cause other than financial necessity may involve immediate suspension, with pay, pending the outcome of a fair and reasonable process. Causes for removal may include immorality, deviation from the Association’s Tenets of Faith, incompetence, insubordination, malfeasance, or financial necessity. A fair and reasonable process shall consist of (1) written notice as to cause of suspension, (2) opportunity to confront any accusers and to provide supporting testimony, (3) opportunity for a hearing by an impartial body of not less than three persons appointed by the Board of Directors, and (4) adequate notice as to the time and place of hearing and adequate time to prepare a defense.

7.2.5 Temporary vacancies may be filled by an acting or interim director at the discretion of the Commission Chair, in consultation with the Association President, subject to reporting and ratification at the next regular COA meeting.

Article IV — COA Delegate Assembly

Section I. Delegates

1.1. COA accredited and preaccredited (candidate) institutions shall be entitled to representation at COA Delegate Assembly meetings on the following basis:

1.1.1. One delegate for each institution holding COA programmatic accreditation.

1.1.2. One delegate for each institution holding COA institutional accreditation or candidate status with student enrollment of 200 or less.

1.1.3. Two delegates for each institution holding COA institutional accreditation or candidate status with student enrollment of 201 to 400.

1.1.4. Three delegates for each institution holding COA institutional accreditation or candidate status with student enrollment of more than 400.

Section 2. Voting Privileges

2.1. Each delegate shall have one vote. Proxy voting shall not be permitted.

2.2. Candidate institution delegates shall have the privilege of discussion from the floor and of voting by acclamation. They shall not exercise the privilege of nominating or voting on officers or of voting by ballot or on amendments to the Constitution or Bylaws.
Section 3. Quorum

Those delegates present at a duly called meeting of the COA Delegate Assembly shall be considered a quorum.

Section 4. Parliamentary Law

All business meetings of the COA Delegate Assembly shall be conducted according to the accepted rules of parliamentary procedure.

Article V — COA Accreditation Standards

Section 1.

Final authority for determining accreditation Standards shall reside in the COA Delegate Assembly.

Section 2.

Recommended changes or additions to the COA’s Standards shall be acted upon by the COA Delegate Assembly upon recommendation of the COA.

Article VI — Indemnification

Section 1.

The corporation shall, to the full extent permitted under Section 108.75 of the Illinois General Not for Profit Corporation Act of 1986, indemnify each person who may serve or who has served at any time as an officer, director, commissioner, or appeal panel member of the corporation against all expenses and liabilities, including, without limitation, counsel fees, judgments, fines, excise taxes, penalties and settlement payments, reasonably incurred by or imposed upon such person in connection with any threatened, pending or completed action, suit or proceeding in which he or she may become involved by reason of his or her service in such capacity; provided that no indemnification shall be provided for any such person with respect to any matter as to which he or she shall have been finally adjudicated in any proceeding not to have acted in good faith in the reasonable belief that such action was in the best interests of the corporation; and further provided that any compromise or settlement payment shall be approved by a majority vote of a quorum of directors who are not at that time parties to the proceeding. Indemnification shall extend to the limits of applicable Directors and Officers or Professional Liability insurance policies which the corporation shall secure and maintain.

Section 2.
The indemnification provided hereunder shall inure to the benefit of the heirs, executors and administrators of persons entitled to indemnification hereunder. The right of indemnification under this Article shall be in addition to and not exclusive of all other rights to which any person may be entitled.

Section 3.

No amendment or repeal of the provisions of this Article which adversely affects the right of an indemnified person under this Article shall apply to such person with respect to those acts or omissions which occurred at any time prior to such amendment or repeal, unless such amendment or repeal was voted by or was made with the written consent of such indemnified person.

Section 4.

This Article constitutes a contract between the corporation and the indemnified officers, directors, or commissioners. No amendment or repeal of the provisions of this Article which adversely affects the right of an indemnified officer, director, or commissioner under this Article shall apply to such officer, director, or employee with respect to those acts or omissions which occurred at any time prior to such amendment or repeal.

Article VII — Ethical Practices

A code of ethics relative to comity, relationships among member institutions, transfer of faculty members or students, advertising accuracy, adherence to catalog statements, and kindred subjects shall be adhered to by member institutions. The COA shall have power to impose sanctions up to and including withdrawal of accredited, preaccredited (candidate), or applicant status for infractions of the code of ethics.

Article VIII — Amendments

Section 1. Substantive amendments

Amendments to these Bylaws may be made by a two-thirds vote of member presidents provided that a majority of those voting shall represent COA-accredited member institutions.

Section 2. Editorial amendments

Editorial amendments, including but not limited to: nomenclature consistency and updates, compositional and grammatical corrections or modifications, clarification of ambiguities, and other amendments intended to ensure the accuracy and consistency of this Constitution without introducing substantive alterations, may be effected on an “act and inform” basis. Such editorial changes will be considered ratified when reported to the membership unless specific action is
undertaken by the relevant governing body to declare the proposed amendments substantive, in which case they will be nullified pending membership approval by means of the normal amendment procedures specified above.

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Glossary of Terms
Glossary of Terms

Ability to Benefit
A United States Department of Education stipulation that an admitted student can be reasonably expected to complete the program.

Academic Calendar
The method by which an institution structures most of its courses throughout the year.

Academic Freedom
The intellectual that gives to members of the academic community the right to examine data, question assumptions and advance ideas within the context of the institution’s mission and doctrinal position.

Academic Administrator
An individual whose primary responsibilities are leadership of the educational division of a postsecondary institution (e.g., provost, academic dean, assistant provost/dean, academic division director, program director, registrar).

Academic Advising
A plan under which each student is served by a faculty member or trained adviser to help plan and implement short- and long-term academic and vocational goals.

Academic Discipline
A field of study that is identified as the focus of an instructor or group.

Academic Division
A group of related departments organized under a director or division chair.

Academic Department
A unit within the institution that offers instruction within a specific area and is generally supervised by a chair (sometimes called a Division in smaller schools).

Academic Program
A coherent collection of courses and other learning experiences that lead to a certificate or degree and are designed to meet specific educational objectives.

Academic Support Department
A department unit in an institution designed to service academic programs, e.g., library, admissions, records, student development.

Accelerated Curriculum
An educational format that requires significantly less time in classrooms than a traditional format.
**Accreditation**
Recognition that an educational institution is voluntarily maintaining the standards of a non-governmental accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

**ADA**
The Americans with Disabilities Act defines an institution’s responsibilities to service students with mental and physical disabilities.

**Administrative Support Department**
An institutional department/unit designed to service the institution as a whole, e.g., accounting, communications, physical plant, development.

**Additional Location**
A facility that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution and at which the institution offers at least 50% of a program. An additional location may qualify as a branch campus and be subject to requirements pertaining to branch campuses.

**Administration**
An executive group of officers (such as president, provost, vice president, dean, treasurer, or development officer) who have the major responsibility for the direction and operation of the institution.

**Alternative Academic Patterns**
Education that takes place in a manner other than the traditional, on-campus pattern.

**Assessment**
An on-going effort to determine the institution or program’s effectiveness in meeting its goals and objectives.

**At-Risk Students**
A phrase used to describe students who have been under-served by educational or social systems.

**Attrition**
The percentage of eligible students who elect to discontinue an academic program.

**Audit**
See “External Financial Audit.”

**Authorization**
Documents that validate an institution’s legal right to operate within the state or province.
Autonomy
The freedom that an institution has to be self-governing.

Bible College
See “Biblical Higher Education.”

Biblical Higher Education
Higher education in which the Bible is central and the development of Christian life and ministry is essential. A biblical higher education requires of all students a substantial core of biblical studies, general studies and ministry formation experiences and integrates a biblical worldview with life and learning. An institution of biblical higher education offers curricula that fulfill its overriding purpose to equip all students for ministry in and for the Church and the world.

Biblical/Theological Studies
A group of courses that incorporate major direct engagement with the Biblical text.

Biblical Worldview
A comprehensive conception of life, culture and the world from a biblical perspective.

Branch Campus
An additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution and (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Bylaws
One of the institution’s two enabling documents, bylaws are a set of rules adopted by an institution to supplement its constitution and regulate its affairs. Bylaws establish process guidance for the effective governance of an institution and its operations.

Campus Culture
The ethos of the institution which reflects its values.

Candidate Status (Preaccreditation)
The status of accreditation and public recognition that a nationally recognized accrediting agency grants to an institution or program for a limited period of time that signifies the agency has determined that the institution or program is progressing toward full accreditation and is likely to attain full accreditation before the expiration of that limited period of time.
Career and Placement Services
A range of services to help students determine a career path and find employment in that career. These might include such services as aptitude and vocational testing, resume writing, interviewing for job searches, or posting of employment positions.

Catalog (Academic Catalog)
A published document (electronic and/or paper) that delineates 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. The catalog is a static document governing requirements and policies for a designated period of time (typically one or two academic years), and therefore, should not be updated at will. An electronic copy of the catalog is to be submitted to the ABHE Commission office annually.

Certification
The process of receiving approval in a specific area by demonstrating that requirements usually stipulated by a governmental body or professional agency have been met.

Christian Service (Student Ministry)
See “Ministry Formation.”

Co-Curricular
Organized student activities that complement the student’s educational program. They may be required (co-curricular) such as chapel or voluntary (extra-curricular) such as athletics.

Commission on Accreditation (COA)
An elected body from the ABHE membership that has the final responsibility for evaluating the degree to which institutions meet the Commission’s Standards and the subsequent granting of accreditation status.

Competency
A clearly defined, measurable outcome demonstrating achievement of, or proficiency in, a specified unit of knowledge or skill.

Competency-Based Education
An outcomes-based system of instruction in which the student’s demonstrated proficiency in specified knowledge or skills is the basis for measuring satisfaction of course, program, or degree requirements. CBE focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes (what a student knows or can do) as the direct measure of student learning, regardless of time spent in class, study, or research, which is an indirect measure of student learning.
Completion Rate
See “Graduation Rate.”

Compliance Document
A self-study report that assesses the extent to which an institution satisfies the ABHE standards and essential elements. The compliance document describes how the institution satisfies the standards and references exhibits that document or evidence that the standards are being met. Where weaknesses exist, the compliance document accurately and candidly identifies those areas in need of improvement.

Conditions of Eligibility
Foundational requirements which must be satisfied by an institution before applicant status is granted. An institution must maintain compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility to remain an applicant, candidate, or accredited institution.

Conflict of Interest Policy
A board-approved policy designed to identify and limit the benefits that a board member or employee may receive through a business arrangement with the institution.

Constituency, External
Groups and individuals who are stakeholders in the mission of the institution without holding any formal role within the institution, such as alumni, donors, employers of alumni, churches.

Constituency, Internal
Groups and individuals who are stakeholders in the mission of the institution and who hold formal roles within the institution, such as students, faculty, staff, administration, trustees, alumni.

Constitution, Charter or Articles of Incorporation
The primary institutional enabling document, the constitution is a written document that defines the purpose, sources of control, doctrinal position, and core values of an institution. It typically focuses on defining the institution and its members and has a rigorous amendment process. A constitution establishes an organization through self-declaration, where a charter establishes an organization through sovereign or government declaration.

Contact Hour
A unit of measure representing an hour of instruction given to students. For each hour of in-class instruction, two hours of out-of-class academic work is normally expected.

Correspondence Education
Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. The interaction between the instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence
education is not distance education. Note: Correspondence education is not within ABHE's scope of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

**Credential**
All degrees and credit-bearing certificates, diplomas, or other recognized educational credentials awarded by an institution. Required credits may vary by state or province. Credentials must be approved by the COA in accordance with the Policy on Substantive Change.

**Credit Hour**
A unit of measure representing the traditional academic value of learning activities. A semester credit hour represents 37.5 hours or more of academic engagement in instructor-designated learning activities for the average student (traditionally, a minimum of 50 minutes of instruction per week over a 15-week period, supplemented by two hours of preparation for each hour of instruction). A quarter credit hour represents 25 hours or more of academic engagement in instructor-designated learning activities for the average student (traditionally, a minimum of 50 minutes of instruction per week over a 10-week period, supplemented by two hours of preparation for each hour of instruction). A quarter credit hour is equivalent to 2/3 of a semester credit hour. The assignment of credit hours may be based on intended learning outcomes, verified through student achievement, that the institution determines are reasonably equivalent to a credit hour of student work.

**Deferred Maintenance**
Identified campus facility and grounds repairs or improvements needed with an indication of targeted dates for their completion.

**Degree Completion Program**
The final portion of a baccalaureate degree program of at least 120 semester credits offered by a baccalaureate degree-granting institution, often in a non-traditional format.

**Distance Education**
Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the other technologies listed.

**Diversity**
The degree to which an institution reflects difference within the constituency, provides exposure, promotes understanding, and expresses appreciation with respect to matters such as ethnicity, race, religion, gender, political orientation or age.
Employee Welfare
The concern that an institution demonstrates for its employees especially in terms for salaries, benefits and professional development.

Enabling Documents
A written Constitution, Charter or Articles of Incorporation accompanied by Bylaws.

Enrollment Management
An institutional process to monitor the factors that are influencing recruitment, admissions, retention and attrition.

Extension Site/Classes
Off-campus site where students and faculty regularly meet in classes and where students may not complete 50% or more of course work toward requirements for one or more of the institution’s educational programs via face-to-face or hybrid courses.

External Financial Audit
A review of the institution’s financial records by a certified firm that includes an opinion statement. Audits submitted to the COA must include the management letter and be conducted according to generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) or Canadian generally accepted auditing standards as a full financial audit (not a review or compilation). See “Management Letter.”

Faculty, Adjunct
Faculty serving in a temporary, auxiliary, or occasional capacity to teach a specific course on a course-by-course basis, usually with no other faculty responsibilities.

Faculty, Administrative
Employees whose primary responsibility is administration but who also may teach.

Faculty, Core
Faculty who are committed to the fulfillment of the institutional mission, responsible for the quality of academic functions, and involved in academic-related decision-making processes, whether teaching full-time or not.

Faculty, Instructional
Full-time faculty whose primary responsibility in the institution is teaching.

Faculty/Staff Handbooks
Written documents that describe policies and procedures that pertain to faculty or staff and terms of employment including benefits and expectations.
FERPA
The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act which defines the privacy rights of students and their families.

Fiduciary Funds
Resources held and administered by an institution when it is acting in a capacity for individuals, private organizations or governments and therefore cannot be used to support the institution’s programs.

Field Education
An in-context learning experience that combines practical experience and reflection and generally occurs off-campus in a setting that relates to the student’s professional goals. May result in academic credit.

Financial Aid
Grants, loans, assistantships, scholarships, fellowships, tuition waivers, tuition discounts, veteran’s benefits, employer assistance and other monies provided to students to meet expenses.

Financial Audit
See “External Financial Audit.”

First-time Student
A student attending any post-secondary institution for the first time. This includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended a post-secondary institution for the first time in the prior summer term and students who entered with advanced standing from high school.

Full-time Student
An undergraduate student who is enrolled for at least 12 credit hours, or a graduate student who is enrolled for the number of credit hours specified by the institution for full-time study. For ABHE reporting purposes, Full Time Equivalency (FTE) is computed as 12 undergraduate credit hours and 9 graduate credit hours.

GED
A General Education Development certificate equivalent to a high school diploma and earned through examinations.

General Studies
Courses that provide a general knowledge of the presuppositions that form the basis for one’s worldview or the focus on the acquisition and awareness of culture and the general skills needed in life.
Goal
A desire or ambition seeking to be accomplished. A goal is general in nature and typically not measurable. It may apply to an institution, program, et cetera.

Governing Board
A group of elected or appointed individuals who are legally responsible for the institution.

Graduation Rate
The percentage of students in a given cohort who complete their program within an expected period of time, typically 150% of the published time required for a full-time student to complete all requirements for graduation.

Grievance Procedures
A process whereby a student or employee may register a concern or complaint with the appropriate officials with a view to resolution.

Higher Education
Formal academic education at the post-secondary level that normally results in academic credentials.

Holistic Development
An educational program that views students as integrated wholes and attempts to stimulate growth in the totality of their being.

Honors Program
A program for students offering opportunities and recognition for advanced educational enrichment, specialization, acceleration or independent study.

Human Resources
The personnel available to enable an institution to realize its mission and goals.

Independent Study
Academic work usually undertaken outside the regular classroom structure but supervised by an instructor.

Information Literacy
The ability to gain access to information from various print and non-print sources including computers and technologically-supported resources.

Institutional Assessment Plan
A written description of the institution’s ongoing assessment activities. The plan identifies instruments or collection methods employed, how and when assessment activities occur (cycles of assessment), how and when data analysis is done, and any achievement benchmarks that have been established. An institutional assessment plan is a required part
of a COA accreditation self-study, but it should also be a living document updated regularly. The institutional assessment plan should provide the evidentiary basis that guides identification of strategies to be implemented through the institutional improvement plan. (For programmatic accreditation, this would be a Programmatic Assessment Plan—an assessment plan for accredited programs.)

### Institutional Improvement Plan
A written description of the institution's plans for the next three to five years, including timeframes, strategies to achieve these plans, assignment of responsibilities for execution, and cost analysis for implementation. The plan is not limited to, but should intentionally address, weaknesses identified through self-study (compliance document findings) and ongoing assessment (institutional assessment plan findings), detailing strategies to address those weaknesses in the coming months or years. An institutional improvement plan is a required part of an ABHE accreditation self-study, but it should also be a living document updated regularly. The institutional improvement plan should reference data and conclusions drawn from the institutional assessment plan, compliance document, or other research activities as the basis and rationale for implementing improvement strategies.

### Instructional Delivery System
The methodology used to provide instruction.

### Integration
A conscious attempt to find commonalities in the academic components of a curriculum.

### Inter-Disciplinary
A curriculum or course that consciously applies the methodology and language from one academic discipline to another to examine a central theme.

### Internal Controls
A comprehensive system of procedures to ensure sound fiscal management.

### Investment Policy
A board-approved policy designed to guide those responsible for the institution’s assets.

### Learning Community
A group of individuals united with a common goal of gaining information and knowledge at a particular location or contact avenue.

### Learning Resources
The wide array of information and services available to support education, including libraries, databases, laboratories, networks, and equipment.
Library
An organized collection of printed, microform and audiovisual materials administered as a unit and made accessible to students and faculty.

Licensure
The permission needed from an appropriate authority to engage in an educational or professional activity.

Major or Concentration
A primary focused area of study in an academic degree or certificate usually comprised of a minimum of 24 credit hours in a single discipline or subject area (typically called a major in undergraduate programs or a concentration in graduate programs). Required credits may vary by state or province. A primary focus area (program) must be approved by the COA in accordance with the Policy on Substantive Change. (c.f. “Program” in Glossary)

Management Letter
A management letter is a document prepared by and from the auditors, addressed to the Board or other Management, which discusses findings and recommendations of improvements in internal control and other management issues. The Management Letter should not be confused with the Management Representation Letter, which is from the Institution to the Auditor; or the Independent Auditor’s Report, which is given as part of the financial statements audit. The management letter is sometimes titled, “Report on Internal Control Over Financial Reporting and on Compliance and Other Matters Based on an Audit of Financial Statements Performed in Accordance with Government Auditing Standards.” See “External Financial Audit.”

Matriculation
Enrollment in an educational institution with intent to complete the designated program.

Ministry Formation
An applied ministry requirement (credit or non-credit) that is viewed as an integral part of the student’s educational program and results in the formation of the student’s philosophy of ministry, commitment to ministry, and hands-on competency in ministry skills.

Minor or Emphasis
A secondary study area (sub-program) in an academic degree or certificate usually comprised of a minimum of 15 credit hours in a single discipline or subject area (typically called a minor in undergraduate programs or an emphasis in graduate programs). Required credits may vary by state or province. The COA does not monitor or verify sub-programs.

Mission Statement
A concise statement of the institution’s purpose, scope of operation or service context, and intended impact.
New Student Orientation
A program offered at the outset of a student’s experience addressing academic, social, emotional and intellectual issues.

Nomenclature
A standardized system of terms used to define academic achievements.

Non-Profit School
An educational institution that is not maintained for the purpose of making a profit.

Objective Data
Research that is based on objective facts such as test results or statistical data.

Objective
An anticipated or intended result of an activity/set of activities that is specific and measurable. An objective communicates sought-after or desired result.

Open Admission
A policy under which virtually all secondary school graduates or students with a GED equivalency diploma are admitted with minimal regard for academic record, test scores or other qualifications.

Operations Manual
A written document that describes the organizational structure, decision-making processes, institutional management policies and procedures and job descriptions for employees.

Outcome
A consequence or end-result of an activity/set of activities that has been measured and can be demonstrated to be the product of those activities. An outcome communicates demonstrated result.

Planning Document
See “Institutional Improvement Plan.”

Planning Process
An on-going systematic procedure involving institutional personnel in analyzing and evaluating assessment data and determining the future direction of the institution.

Preaccreditation
See “Candidate Status.”
Prescriptive Standards
Commission Standards that express specific characteristics of academic excellence and minimal expectations.

Privacy Rights
Freedom from unauthorized intrusion into a student or employee’s personal affairs.

Professional Development Program
A planned program for faculty and staff acquisition of knowledge and development of skills.

Professional Studies
Courses that provide an understanding of and competence in a vocational field.

Program
A primary focused area of study in an academic degree, certificate, or diploma, usually comprised of 24 or more credit hours in a single discipline or subject area (typically called a major in undergraduate programs or a concentration in graduate programs). Required credits may vary by state or province. Programs must be approved by the COA in accordance with the Policy on Substantive Change.

Program Objective
An anticipated or intended result of completion of an academic program. Program objectives should be measurable and stated in terms of what a student completing the program will know, be able to do, or believe/affirm.

Programmatic Assessment Plan (for programmatic accreditation)
A written description of the institution’s ongoing assessment activities for COA-accredited programs. The plan identifies instruments or collection methods employed, when assessment activities occur (cycles of assessment), how and when data analysis is done, and any achievement benchmarks that have been established. A programmatic assessment plan is a required part of a COA accreditation self-study for programmatic accreditation, but it should also be a living document updated regularly. The programmatic assessment plan should provide the evidentiary basis that guides identification of strategies to be implemented through the programmatic improvement plan.

Programmatic Improvement Plan (for programmatic accreditation)
A written description of the institution’s plans for the next three to five years for COA-accredited programs, including timeframes, strategies to achieve these plans, assignment of responsibilities for execution, and cost analysis for implementation. The plan is not limited to, but should intentionally address, weaknesses identified through self-study (compliance document findings) and ongoing assessment (programmatic assessment plan findings), detailing strategies to address those weaknesses in the coming months or years. A programmatic improvement plan is a required part of a COA accreditation self-study for programmatic accreditation, but it should also be a living document updated regularly. The
programmatic improvement plan should reference data and conclusions drawn from the programmatic assessment plan, compliance document, or other research activities as the basis and rationale for implementing improvement strategies.

Qualified Personnel
Those who have appropriate competencies for their responsibilities, often shown through degrees and experience consistent with industry standards.

Qualitative Measures
Academic evaluation procedures that utilize subjective data such as interviews, surveys or personal assessments.

Quantitative Measures
Academic evaluation procedures that utilize statistical comparisons of objective data such as pre- and post-testing, graduation rates, or job placement rates.

Reference Services
Assistance provided by professional librarians to students or faculty in their research efforts.

Remedial Services
Instruction designed for students deficient in general competencies necessary for postsecondary studies. These courses often grant credit that does not count toward graduation.

Retention Rate
The percentage of students who persist in their educational program, typically from first year of enrollment to the same period the following year.

School
An organized unit within a university structure that offers academic programs, is supervised by a dean and supported by designated faculty.

Show Cause
An order from the COA that an institution show cause why its accreditation or candidate status should be continued. Failure to achieve compliance with the specified standard(s) by the deadline imposed by the COA will result in removal of the institution’s status with the COA.

Spiritual Formation
The process utilized by an institution to encourage growth in Christian maturity.

Staff
Non-administrative and non-instructional personnel who provide support services to the institution.
Standards for Accreditation
A written statement of the criteria by which an institution can measure its educational effectiveness and the COA can determine an institution’s accreditation status.

Subjective Data
Research data that is based on personal opinion or evaluation obtained from interviews, surveys, or similar instruments.

Student Development
An area of an educational institution whose primary objective is to support students in their pursuit of intellectual, social, physical, spiritual and professional development.

Student Learning Objective
An anticipated or intended measurable result of a learning activities/set of activities describing what a student will know, be able to do, or believe/affirm.

Student Learning Outcome
A measured or demonstrated end-result of a learning activity/set of activities evidencing what a student knows, can do, or believes/affirms.

Student Ministry
See “Ministry Formation.”

Teaching Load
The assigned responsibilities of an instructor that include both teaching and non-teaching activities.

Teach-Out
A process during which a program, institution, or institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program engages in an orderly closure or when, following the closure of an institution or campus, another institution provides an opportunity for the students of the closed school to complete their program, regardless of their academic progress at the time of closure.

Teach-Out Agreement
A written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program offered, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.
Teach-Out Plan
A written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

Team Teaching
An instructional approach where one or more instructors share course implementation. In an instance where one instructor is appropriately credentialed to instruct in a course and one or more instructor(s) are not appropriately credentialed to instruct in a course, the appropriately credentialed instructor should be involved in, at least, 50% of the overall course implementation (e.g., course design, course instruction, course grading, student engagement, etc.).

Technological Resources
Electronic and other means used to enhance and advance instruction, research and institutional quality.

Terminal Degree
A degree that is considered the appropriate preparation for teaching at the post-secondary level, usually a doctor’s degree, but may include certain professional degrees such as the MSW, MLS, MBA, or MFA. In some academic disciplines, ThM or MDiv are not considered terminal.

Traditional Academic Patterns
Academic patterns that are usually by semester (two semesters of about 15 weeks each), trimester (three periods of about 12 weeks each) or quarter system (three or four quarters of about 10 weeks each).

Transfer Credit
Academic credits completed at another institution and applied to an academic program in process according to the institution’s policies.

Under-Represented Population
A percentage of the institution’s population that is significantly lower when compared to the total constituency.

Vision
A description of the dream of the leadership that drives the institution.

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