

PROPOSED INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

ABHE PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION

An ABHE-accredited institution documents that it is in accord with the Association for Biblical Higher Education's Tenets of Faith and has a mission statement appropriate to biblical higher education as defined below:

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.

An ABHE-accredited institution demonstrates that it is in substantial compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility and Standards of Accreditation and can be reasonably expected to continue to (1) achieve its stated mission, (2) substantially comply with the Standards of Accreditation, and (3) pursue ongoing institutional improvement.

An ABHE-accredited institution demonstrates compliance with the Standards of Accreditation for all educational sites, instructional modalities, or other methods of delivery, such as competency-based, direct assessment programs, and languages of instruction.

An ABHE-accredited institution documents its compliance with the Standards of Accreditation with appropriate evidence. When a Standard requires a policy statement, the policy is (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. For more information, see the *Policy on Academic Quality as Related to Institutional Mission*.

STANDARD 1 INTEGRITY AND MISSION

The institution operates with integrity and has an institutional mission appropriate to biblical higher education.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. Integrity in all operations, including financial management, admissions, academic programs, student services, media, and institutional governance.
2. Fulfillment of applicable policies and requirements of the Commission as demonstrated by honest, complete, and timely communication with the Commission regarding compliance with all oversight agencies.
3. Processes, written policies, and grievance procedures (with consistent record-keeping) governing various relationships within the institution (including students, faculty, staff, and board) that ensure institutional integrity, avoid inherent conflicts of interest, and ensure equitable and consistent treatment of students and employees.
4. Published 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 (students, staff, faculty, administration, and board).
5. Institutional values and practices that foster respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives consistent with the institution's mission.
6. A board, faculty, and staff reflective of the diversity of the constituency and the students it serves and consistent with institutional theological distinctives.
7. Institutional values and practices that contribute to an educational community of belonging and service to students, employees, alumni, and other institutional constituents.
8. A clearly written mission statement appropriate to biblical higher education, developed and periodically reviewed by broad representation from all sectors of the institution, and ratified by the governing board.
9. A mission statement easily located on the institution's website and in its catalog(s).
10. A mission statement that guides faculty, staff, administration, and the governing board in operations, planning, resource allocation, and program development.

STANDARD 2 INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

The institution's system of ongoing institutional planning and assessment demonstrates that it accomplishes and can continue to accomplish its mission and provides opportunities for systematic institutional and program improvement.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A written, comprehensive assessment plan that describes the systematic collection of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the institution's operations and services and the fulfillment of student learning outcomes at the institutional and program level. The assessment plan explains how and when data are gathered in an ongoing and structured way.
2. Clearly defined and measurable outcomes for operational units, services, and academic programs (including general education and Bible/theology components of undergraduate degree programs) that align with institutional mission. Student learning outcomes must be appropriate to the credential awarded and accompanied by multiple measures that effectively assess the extent to which students are achieving the program's stated outcomes.
3. Implementation of the assessment plan for operations, services, and academic programs evidenced by documented analysis of assessment data and use of results by appropriate constituencies for the purpose of improvement and planning.
4. Outcomes data, disaggregated in missionally relevant ways, used to demonstrate a commitment to the success of all students in attaining intended learning outcomes.
5. The ongoing provision of reliable and current information to the public, including graduation rates, employment rates for professional programs, and licensure pass rates for programs where licensure is expected. Such outcomes data must be available via the institutions' website through an easily identified link on the homepage.
6. Written, institutional plans describing future objectives, developed with broad representation from all sectors of the institution and its stakeholders, informed by assessment and institutional needs, aligned with realistic resource projections, and accompanied by consistent reporting on plan achievement.
7. Evidence that institutional assessment data informs ongoing institutional decision-making and a sound budgeting process in alignment with institutional planning.
8. Leadership of institutional planning, assessment of operations and services, and assessment of student learning outcomes by a director or directors with related job responsibilities.

STANDARD 3 AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Institution has legal authority to operate in its state or province, and in all other jurisdictions in which it operates, and has a governing board with legal and fiduciary authority to exercise appropriate oversight of the institution.

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, tenets of faith, and control; and provide a basis for governance and administration. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution must have its own enabling documents.
2. Authorization to award the credentials that it offers in all the jurisdictions in which it operates, including distance education.
3. A governing board that exercises legal authority for the institution, is autonomous to make decisions in the institution's best interest and ensures institutional integrity. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution must have its own governing board, which must include representatives from a broader pool than the leadership of the sponsoring organization alone, and exercise autonomy over institutional decisions.
4. Board membership that excludes all employees except the chief executive officer, and board officers that do not include the chief executive officer.
5. A conflict-of-interest policy, regularly affirmed by each board member, that protects the board from undue influence related to financial interests, contracts, employment, family, or other personal interests.
6. Ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the board and its members, including analysis of assessment data and use of results for the purpose of improvement.
7. A process for effective recruitment, orientation, and development of board members to ensure stability and new membership.
8. Appropriate board oversight of financial management to meet public accountability obligations.
9. Published board policies and practices that define the board's authority and limitations and clearly distinguish board and staff roles.

STANDARD 4

ADMINISTRATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Institution employs and supports competent personnel who effectively discharge their duties in support of mission achievement.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A sufficient number of qualified personnel to provide services to all stakeholders.
2. A chief executive officer who has the character, capacity, and professional qualifications to fulfill the institution-specific role, and who is sufficiently engaged with the institution to lead toward the accomplishment of its mission.
3. A chief executive officer appointed by, reporting to, and evaluated on a regular basis by the board.
4. Administrative leaders with education, experience, capacity, and competencies appropriate to their specific duties and to the level of education offered.
5. Published policies and procedures relating to the recruitment, appointment, role and responsibilities, professional development, evaluation, promotion, termination, and welfare of institutional employees.
6. A clearly documented organizational structure appropriate to the size and scope of the institution that encompasses all units and roles and includes written job responsibilities.
7. Mission-driven values and practices that encourage job satisfaction and employee engagement.
8. Policies, procedures, and practices for the protection of personnel from threat of harm or loss, including security measures, crisis response measures, and protection of privacy.
9. Complete, accurate, and securely maintained administrative records of institutional decision-making.

Faculty

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

10. Committed Christian faculty members who engage in the academic, spiritual, and vocational development of students.
11. Faculty members who possess earned and appropriately documented 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.
12. Undergraduate faculty members who have earned a minimum of a master's degree and teach in an area of documented expertise. Graduate faculty members who have earned a terminal or doctoral degree and teach in an area of documented expertise. Faculty credentials based on factors other than degrees earned must be justified by appropriate documentation.
13. Published policies and procedures that delineate the authority and responsibility of the faculty in making decisions related to curriculum, program development, academic policies and procedures, graduation requirements, and other academic matters.
14. A faculty of sufficient size and expertise to support the institution's mission, ensure the quality of curriculum, and provide effective leadership of educational programs.
15. Published policies and procedures that address the intellectual property rights and academic freedom of faculty members.
16. Systems for evaluating and improving instructional effectiveness.

STANDARD 5 FINANCIAL AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The Institution maintains and effectively manages the financial and physical resources necessary to achieve its mission.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. An annual independent, opinioned audit, prepared by a licensed accounting professional, approved by the board, and made available to the public.
2. Financial stability including adequate revenue streams to realize institutional mission and sufficient financial reserves to enable effective response to unforeseen financial circumstances and enrollment fluctuations.
3. A budgeting process, informed by institutional planning, that serves as an effective instrument of financial oversight.
4. Risk management policies and procedures and adequate internal controls sufficient to safeguard assets and protect personnel from accusations of wrongdoing.
5. Adequate institutional resources, including finances, facilities, equipment, supplies, and technology to support its mission, achieve educational goals, and ensure continuity of offerings.
6. Sufficient personnel to adequately maintain institutional resources.
7. Facilities and services compliant with applicable health, safety, and disability access codes.
8. Policies, procedures, and practices for effective maintenance and protection of institutional resources from threat of harm or loss, including security measures and crisis response measures.
9. Reliable technology platforms and related policies and procedures that support institutional mission and ensure secure storage and regular back-ups of institutional data.

STANDARD 6 ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The institution develops and implements an enrollment management plan that is consistent with its mission and addresses issues of recruitment, admissions, and student financial services.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A written, mission-focused enrollment management plan that addresses recruitment, admissions, and student financial services, is appropriate to the level of education, and is applied consistently in the admissions process.
2. Admissions requirements and student financial services that are clearly communicated to prospective students.
3. The allocation of resources and authority to support effective recruitment, admissions, and student financial service efforts.
4. Student recruitment and admissions policies and practices that are directed toward students whose spiritual commitments, educational goals, and interests are consistent with the intended outcomes of the institution and that promote diversity of ethnicity and sex appropriate to the institution's theological and cultural context.
5. Evaluation procedures and/or programs that reasonably ensure admitted students have attained the requisite educational level, possess the ability to achieve their educational goals successfully, and are adequately prepared for their desired level of study and instructional modality.
6. Accurate and fair descriptions of the institution's admissions policies, transfer credit and prior learning policies and criteria, articulation agreements, and effectiveness claims in institutional publications (print and electronic), statements, and advertising.
7. Accurate financial aid information regarding scholarships, grants, loans, and refunds that is published and made available to prospective and enrolled students.
8. Financial aid practices that meet applicable regulatory and reporting requirements.
9. Financial counseling services that help students make decisions regarding financing their education and inform students who receive financial assistance of any repayment obligations.

STANDARD 7 ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

The institution's academic programs are designed with appropriate curricula, policies, and practices to impart the knowledge, skills, and practical experiences necessary for lifelong learning, vocational competence, and development of a biblical worldview.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Curriculum

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

1. Academic programs designed with content and rigor characteristic of higher education and the knowledge and skills needed for lifelong learning commensurate with the level of education offered.
2. Curriculum designed to support the development of a biblical worldview.
3. Curriculum designed to prepare graduates for effective engagement in diverse and multicultural contexts.
4. Curriculum that progresses from foundational to advanced studies appropriate to the degree and level of education offered.
5. Practical experiences and application of knowledge through practicums, internships, course-embedded experiential learning, or other appropriate means for ministry and professional programs.
6. A cycle of regular academic program review that supports program planning and improvement.

Relative to this standard, the undergraduate programs of an accredited institution are characterized by...

7. The equivalent of a minimum of 120 semester hours for a baccalaureate degree and 60 semester hours for an associate degree.
8. A core of Bible/theology studies equivalent to a minimum of 30 semester hours for a four- or five-year baccalaureate degree, 24 semester hours for a Canadian three-year baccalaureate degree, 18 semester hours for a non-traditional degree completion program or transfer students needing fewer than 60 semester hours to complete a baccalaureate degree, and 12 semester hours for an associate degree or one- or two-year certificate program.
9. A core of general studies equivalent to a minimum of 30 semester hours for a baccalaureate degree or 15 semester 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.
10. The equivalent of a minimum of 18 semester hours of professional and/or ministry studies for a baccalaureate degree.

Relative to this standard, graduate programs of an accredited institution are characterized by...

11. The equivalent of a minimum of 30 semester hours for a master's degree (except for the Master of Divinity, which requires the equivalent of a minimum of 72 semester hours) and the equivalent of a minimum of 30 semester hours beyond the master's degree for a doctoral degree.
12. Appropriate prerequisite and/or curricular requirements to ensure that students are prepared to pursue graduate studies.

13. Cohesive graduate curriculum designed to advance students' academic knowledge, research skills, and professional expertise substantially beyond that required of undergraduate programs.
14. Curricular requirements that ensure graduate students demonstrate significant ability to engage in biblical integration and theological reflection in relation to their academic or professional disciplines through prerequisites, curricular requirements, or program-level learning outcomes.
15. Doctoral-level programs that build upon and advance students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence required of master-level programs.
16. Doctoral program outcomes appropriate to program purpose and institutional mission, and that ensure doctoral students demonstrate comprehensive understanding and mastery of the knowledge and skills appropriate to the field of study.

Academic Policies and Procedures

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

17. An academic advising system that guides the student from the point of program selection to graduation.
18. An academic calendar that meets state, provincial, and federal regulations and considers regional higher educational patterns. Clear, published policies govern any alternative patterns utilized.
19. Published policies for awarding academic credit commensurate with normative academic and/or governmental definitions, including credit awarded based on direct assessment of intended learning outcomes.
20. A system of grading and associated policies and procedures that reflects integrity, ensures fairness and consistency, conforms to higher education norms, and facilitates transferability of students' academic credits.
21. Appropriate measures to ensure that the student receiving credit is the person completing the work, and notification in writing at the time of registration or enrollment of any additional charges associated with verification of student identity.
22. Advanced standing policies for master-level programs ensuring that a minimum of 50% of semester hours applied to degree requirements are awarded from curricula designed and delivered at the graduate level.
23. Policies ensuring at least 25% of semester hours required for an undergraduate degree and at least 33% of semester hours required for a graduate degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree.
24. A clear and publicized statement of faculty-adopted graduation requirements consistently applied to the certification of graduates.

STANDARD 8 LEARNING RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The institution secures, maintains, and ensures access to a collection of learning resources and services necessary to support the research and information needs of the learning community regardless of location, instructional modality, or language of instruction.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. Published policies and procedures relating to the management, access, and security of learning resources and services.
2. Physical and technological resources that effectively support access to and security of learning resources and services.
3. A collection of learning resources appropriate to the curriculum, co-curriculum, and course offerings with regard to content, format, usage, and currency.
4. Availability of reference, technical, circulation services, and other means of support to meet the research and information needs of the learning community.
5. Appropriate documentation of participation in, and regular review of, resource sharing networks or other cooperative agreements that involve the use of learning resources and services, if applicable.
6. Adequate library staffing and effective leadership by a director with a graduate degree in library sciences or a related field, and faculty status.
7. Effective collaboration of library personnel and faculty in curriculum planning and learning resource development.
8. Curricular requirements, instruction, and reference services supporting development of information literacy skills.

STANDARD 9 STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS

The institution provides services that contribute to the holistic development, care, and success of students and are appropriate to the level of education and instructional modality.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. Services that demonstrate a commitment to the holistic development of students and are consistent with institutional mission and an educational community of belonging.
2. Services that address diverse student needs, abilities, and cultures regardless of location or instructional modality.
3. Services that address the needs of at-risk students and improve student achievement and retention.
4. Clear, timely, and ongoing communication of available support services to students.
5. A commitment to spiritual formation that fosters student personal faith and spiritual development.
6. Academic and/or co-curricular ministry preparation of all students to be effective witnesses, servants, and workers in the church and the world.
7. Systems that encourage student input for the purpose of institutional decision-making.