



Achieving ABHE Standards 1-3

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Principles of Accreditation

- Biblical higher education mission
- Patterns of compliance
- Compliance for all educational sites, instructional modalities, languages of instruction, pedagogical models
- Supports with evidence

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Standard 1: Integrity and Mission

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

Key Terms (from the COA Standards and Policies Manual)

- **Mission Statement** – A concise statement of the institution’s purpose, scope of operation or service context, and intended impact.
- **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 fulfills its overriding purpose to equip all students for effective witness in and for the Church and the world.

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Key Considerations

Community of Belonging

An institutional ethos in which student, faculty, and staff are known, supported, and valued regardless of differences in demographic characteristics, background and experiences, or perspectives.

Integrity

“...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

Mission Alignment

The assumption of the standard is that institutional decision-making is consistently informed by the institution’s mission.

Policy is what you say you do. **Practice** is what you *actually* do.

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Standard 1: Integrity and Mission

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 Commission policies and requirements as demonstrated by honest, complete, and timely communication with the Commission regarding compliance with all oversight agencies.
3. Written policies and documented processes (including grievance procedures with consistent record-keeping) that govern various relationships within the institution (including those with students, faculty, staff, and board members) to ensure equitable and consistent treatment and avoid inherent conflicts of interest.

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Standard 1: Integrity and Mission

4. Published policies and procedures 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 (including students, staff, faculty, administration, and board members).
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 institution's constituency and the students it serves, and consistent with institutional theological distinctives.
7. Institutional values and practices that foster an educational community of belonging and service for 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.

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Standard 1: Integrity and Mission

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.

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Applicable Policies

See the current COA Standards and Policies Manual

- **Policy on Academic Quality as Related to Institutional Mission**
- **Policy on Closing an Institution**
- **Policy on Conferral of Honorary Doctoral Degrees**
- **Policy on Ethical Practices**
- **Policy on Falsification of Data**
- **Policy on Institutional, Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status**
- **Policy on Student Success and Institutional Culture**

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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.

Key Terms (from the COA Standards and Policies Manual)

- **Planning** – An ongoing systematic procedure involving institutional personnel in analyzing and evaluating assessment data and determining the future direction of the institution.

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Standard 2: Institutional Planning and Assessment

- **Assessment** – An on-going effort to determine the institution or program's effectiveness in achieving its mission and intended outcomes. Institution-level assessment includes, but is not limited to, collection, analysis, and reporting of graduation rates, retention rates, placement rates for professional programs, and licensure pass rates, as applicable. Program-level assessment includes, but is not limited to, assessment of the effectiveness of academic programs in supporting student achievement of intended learning outcomes. Operational unit or support service-level assessment includes, but may not be limited to, assessment of the effectiveness of operational units and/or services in achieving intended outcomes and supporting achievement of institutional mission.

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Key Considerations

Assessment is ongoing

The assumption of the standard is that the institution consistently engages in assessment and planning (not just for accreditation).

Demonstrates mission accomplishment

The assumption of the standard is that the information required will provide a preponderance of evidence that your institution is achieving its mission now and can continue to do so in the future.

Systematic institutional and program improvement

The assumption of the standard is that assessment processes will both demonstrate mission achievement AND identify opportunities for improvement.

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Standard 2: Institutional Planning and Assessment

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 institutional and program levels. 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, support services, and academic programs (including general education and Bible/theology components of undergraduate degree programs) that align with institutional mission. Student learning outcomes are appropriate to the credential awarded and are accompanied by multiple measures that effectively assess the extent to which students are achieving the program's stated outcomes.

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Standard 2: Institutional Planning and Assessment

3. Implementation of the assessment plan for operational units, support 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 and retention rates, employment rates for professional programs, and licensure pass rates for programs where licensure is expected. Required outcomes data are available via the institution's website through an easily identified link on the homepage.

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Standard 2: Institutional Planning and Assessment

6. Written institutional improvement 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 assessment data informs ongoing institutional decision-making and a sound budgeting process in alignment with institutional planning.
8. Leadership of planning and assessment by a director or directors with related job responsibilities.

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Applicable Policies

See the current COA Standards and Policies Manual

- **Policy on Academic Quality as Related to Institutional Mission**
- **Policy on Outcomes**
- **Policy on Bible/Theology Core**

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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.

Key Terms (from the COA Standards and Policies Manual)

- **Authorization** – Documents that validate an institution's legal right to operate within a given state or province.
- **Governing Board** – A group of elected and/or appointed individuals with legal and fiduciary responsibility for the institution.
- **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*.

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Key Considerations

Autonomy

The assumption of the standard is that the governing board is sufficiently autonomous to act in the best interest of the institution.

State Approval/Authorization

Institutions must have authorization to award the credentials it offers in its home state and to provide the education it offers in all jurisdictions in which it operates.

Conflict of Interest

The assumption of the standard is that institutions have a conflict-of-interest policy that covers all likely scenarios, and that the policy is regularly executed.

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Standard 3: Authority and Governance

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, statements of faith, and control; and provide a basis for governance and administration. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution has 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 and ensures institutional integrity, with autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of the institution. Where an institution is a subsidiary of a parent organization, the institution has its own governing board that includes representatives from a broader pool than the governing board of the sponsoring organization alone and exercises autonomy over institutional decisions.

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Standard 3: Authority and Governance

4. Published board policies and practices that define the board's authority and limitations and clearly distinguish board and staff roles.
5. Board membership that excludes all employees except the chief executive officer. The chief executive officer does not serve as a board officer.
6. 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 relationships, or other personal interests.
7. A process for effective recruitment, orientation, and development of board members to ensure board stability and engagement and identify new members.
8. Appropriate board oversight of financial management to meet public accountability obligations.
9. 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.

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Applicable Policies

See the current COA Standards and Policies Manual

- **Policy on Governance**
- **Policy on Semi-Autonomous Institutions**
- **Policy on State/Government Authorization**

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