

Principles of Accreditation

The Principles below were adopted by the Delegate Assembly as part of the 2024 Standards revision. They are currently published in the Introduction of the COA Standards and Policies Manual but would be more visible to institutions as a policy statement.

The ABHE Principles of Accreditation provide a principles-based foundation for consistent interpretation of ABHE Standards and policies. With few exceptions, ABHE accreditation standards are written descriptively, not prescriptively, in order to provide institutional flexibility and opportunities for innovation within the guardrails of objective quality standards. In cases where the Standards do not seem fully applicable by reason of institutional distinctives, the ABHE Commission on Accreditation (COA) may exercise flexibility in the application of Standards, giving greater emphasis to positive educational outcomes.

A principal value of accreditation is the stimulus for development and continuous improvement that institutions or programs experience in the accreditation process; consequently, the spirit of accreditation is one of constructive evaluation and helpfulness while evaluating adherence to quality standards.

The Principles

An ABHE COA-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 COA-accredited institution demonstrates patterns of evidence that indicate substantial compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility and Standards of Accreditation. An ABHE COA-accredited institution 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-COA accredited institution demonstrates compliance with the Standards of Accreditation for all educational sites, instructional modalities, languages of instruction, and pedagogical models including competency-based, and direct assessment programs.

An ABHE COA-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*.

Adopted February 2024 as part of new Standards; [Proposed February 2026](#)

Policy on the Spirit of Accreditation

Replace the *Policy on the Spirit of Accreditation* with the *Principles of Accreditation* policy since both address the philosophical foundation of the accreditation enterprise.

~~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 on the Principles 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~~