



What's New?: ABHE Standard and Policy Updates

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Important Resources to Track Changes

- <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>
- Click on COA Manual – CHANGES
- This document will include ALL CHANGES from the previous FEBRUARY up until the present time. (The current COA Manual – CHANGES document is for February 2025-last week)
- New changes that were initiated this week will be in the 2026 edition which will be released in March.

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Review of Changes to Accreditation Standards

FEBRUARY 2025-FEBRUARY 2026

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Definition of Accreditation Standard

A written statement of the criteria by which an institution can measure its educational effectiveness, and the COA can determine an institution or program's accreditation status (2025 COA Standards and Policies Manual, page 242)

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Procedure for Standards Changes

- Recommendations for addition, deletion, or modification to the COA's accreditation policies, procedures, or Standards may originate from any source.
- Recommendations are then studied by the Standards and Policies Committee. 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.
- If the COA agrees with the worthiness of a recommendation, it will approve the proposed change(s) for public comment.

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Procedure for Standards Changes (cont'd)

- Recommendations released by the COA for public comment are then circulated by electronic means to ABHE constituencies including member institutions, states, provinces, other recognized accrediting bodies, and the public, and published on the Association's website.
- Public comment is reviewed by the Standards and Policies Committee for additional edits and then the Standard is recommended to the Commission for approval.
- Standards recommendations that have gained final approval from the COA are placed before the COA Delegate Assembly for a vote.
- Unless otherwise specified by the COA, institutions or programs have **two years to comply** with newly adopted Standards.

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Standards Changes (Feb 2025-Feb 2026)

- There have been NO CHANGES to Standards or related Essential Elements between February 2025 and this minute. However, proposed changes to Standards 2, 7, and 8 will be presented to the Delegate Assembly later today for adoption.
- In light of an April 23, 2025 Executive Order by President Trump, the Commission suspended review of institutions on selected language in EEs that could be interpreted as DEI-related. At its recent meeting, revisions to the suspended language were proposed and approved by the COA. The proposed language will be sent out for public comment in the coming weeks.

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Explanation of New or Revised Accreditation Policies

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Definition of a Policy

- Commission on Accreditation policies provide supplemental guidance regarding implementation of the Standards for Accreditation. Institutions are expected to use the policies to understand how the Commission on Accreditation interprets various aspects of the Standards. Evaluators may use the policies as a basis for “Suggestions” to institutions, but “Recommendations” by evaluators may only be attached to Standards. (COA Standards and Policies Manual, p. 36)
- The Policies are organized into two sections:
 - 1) **Policies Relating to Institutions and Programs**
 - a. Policies Relating to Accreditation Standards
 - b. Policies Relating to Accreditation Procedures
 - c. Policies Relating to General Institutional Guidance
 - 2) **Policies Relating to Commission on Accreditation Procedures and Practices**

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Procedure for Policy Changes

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- Recommendations are then studied by the Standards and Policies Committee. 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.
- If the COA agrees with the worthiness of a recommendation, it will approve the proposed change(s) for public comment.

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Procedure for Policy Changes (cont'd)

- Recommendations released by the COA for public comment are then circulated by electronic means to ABHE constituencies including member institutions, states, provinces, other recognized accrediting bodies, and the public, and published on the Association's website.
- Public comment is reviewed by the Standards and Policies Committee for additional edits and then the policy is recommended to the Commission for adoption.
- **EXCEPTION:** Act and inform policies based on USDE changes.
- Policy and procedural recommendations adopted by the COA do not require approval by the COA Delegate Assembly.
- Institutions or programs have one year to comply with newly adopted policies.

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Recent Policy Change List (February 2025 – February 2026)

- Considerations When Closing an Institution of Higher Education (p. 160; February 2025)
- Policy and Procedures for Educational Sites Geographically Separate from the Main Campus (February 2026)
- Policy and Procedures for Federal Prison Education Programs (PEPs) (p. 108; June 2025)
- Policy and Procedures for Institutional Accreditation (p. 112; June 2025)
- Policy and Procedures for Programmatic Accreditation (February 2026)
- Policy on Assignment of Primary and Secondary Readers (February 2026)
- Policy on Certificate, Diploma, and Associate Degree Programs (February 2026)
- Policy on Changes to the Commission on Accreditation's Policies, Procedures, and Standards (p. 171; June 2025)
- Policy on Communication of Accreditation Decisions and Negative Actions (February 2026)

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Recent Policy Change List (February 2025 – February 2026)

- Policy on Competency-Based Education and Direct Assessment (February 2026)
- Policy on Composition of Evaluation Teams (p. 188; June 2025)
- Policy on Conflicts of Interest (February 2026)
- Policy on General Studies (February 2026)
- Policy on Independent Accreditation Status (p. 136; February 2025)
- Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status (June 2025, February 2026)
- Policy on Institutions Where the Primary Instructional Language is Other Than English (February 2026)
- Policy on Instructional Modalities (February 2025/February 2026)
- Policy on International Education Programs (February 2026)
- Policy on Public Notification of Comprehensive Visit (p. 140; June 2025)

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Recent Policy Change List (February 2025 – February 2026)

- Policy on Review of Standards (February 2026)
- Policy on Substantive Change and Required Notifications (p. 144; February 2025/June 2025)
- Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Teach-Out Agreements (p. 155; February 2025)
- Procedures for Arbitration of Adverse Actions Following (February 2026)
- NEW Policy on Correspondence Education (February 2026)
- NEW Policy on Distance Education (p. 52; February 2025)
- NEW Policy on Graduate Education (p. 66; February 2025)
- NEW Policy on Innovative Programs (February 2026)
- NEW Principles of Accreditation (February 2026)

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A Look Ahead

Examining the Climate and Currents in the World of Accreditation

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Challenges

- Negative rhetoric about accreditors from the Administration, the Department of Education, the press, the public...
- Negotiated rule-making to **Reform and Strengthen America's Higher Education Accreditation System** with the following stated priorities:
 - simplify recognition processes,
 - eliminate remaining regional distinctions,
 - increased scrutiny on separate and independent requirements,
 - **focus on program outcomes,**
 - transfer of credit policies requiring more of receiving institutions,
 - eliminate accreditation DEI standards,
 - ensure that public institutions comply with the Constitution, and
 - protection for states' rights



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Q&A

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