

ABHE Standards

The Association for Biblical Higher Education

Comprehensive Integrated Standards

STANDARD 1

MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The institution's written mission is clear and appropriate to higher education as well as its own specific educational role. The mission statement serves as the foundation for institutional operations, programs, and activities.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. 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.
2. A mission statement that is published widely among both internal and external constituencies.
3. A mission statement that guides faculty, staff, administration, and governing boards in making decisions related to planning, resource allocation, program development, and educational outcomes.
4. Clearly articulated and publicized institutional goals that directly relate to the mission statement.
5. Clearly articulated and publicized objectives for each educational program that support institutional goals.

STANDARD 2

STUDENT LEARNING, INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS & PLANNING

The institution demonstrates that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its mission, goals and program objectives and improve performance through a regular, comprehensive, and sustainable system of assessment and planning. Central to this plan is the systematic and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures the student's knowledge, skills and competencies against institutional and programmatic goals.

2a. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING AND PLANNING

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. The identification of appropriate integrated student outcomes in the context of institutional goals, program-specific objectives and course objectives.
2. A shared commitment on the part of students, faculty, staff, administration, and governing board to achieve these stated outcomes.
3. A written plan of ongoing outcomes assessment that articulates multiple means to validate expected learning outcomes and that is subjected to a periodic review process.
4. Criteria appropriate to the higher education credential to be awarded for evaluating success with respect to student achievement and to the level of education.
5. Validation, as a result of using the outcomes assessment plan, that students are achieving the stated outcomes relative to institutional goals, program-specific objectives and course objectives.
6. A process whereby these outcome measurements lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.
7. The ongoing provision of reliable information to the public regarding student achievement, including graduation and employment rates.

2b. ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND PLANNING

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A written comprehensive assessment document that describes how the institution measures its effectiveness in an ongoing and structured way.
2. Meaningful analysis of assessment data and use of results by appropriate constituencies for the purpose of improvement.
3. Substantial documentation issuing from its assessment processes that the institution is effective in fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals and objectives.
4. A planning process that is comprehensive, involves representatives of the various institutional constituencies, and is subject to a periodic review process.
5. A plan that reflects the institution's mission, is based on assessment results, and is aligned with realistic resources projections.
6. A system for monitoring institutional progress in achieving planning goals.

7. The ongoing provision of reliable information to the public regarding its performance.

STANDARD 3

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The institution demonstrates Christian 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 #6), websites and other web 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. An institutional culture that fosters respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
4. Equitable and consistent treatment of employees and students consistent with appropriate published policies.
5. Honest and open communication regarding compliance with agencies such as accrediting, licensing, and governing bodies.
6. Fulfillment of all applicable standards, policies, and requirements of the ABHE Commission on Accreditation.
7. Integrity in financial matters and in compliance with applicable legal and governmental regulations.

[Policies to Reference: Policy Concerning the Conferring of Honorary Doctoral Degrees; Policy on Ethical Practices; Policy on Falsification of Data; Principles of Good Practice in Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

STANDARD 4

AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE

The institution is legally constituted as a nonprofit organization authorized by its state or province to operate as an educational institution and grant all degrees and/or offer credentials. The institution has a 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.
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 exercises legal power for the operation of the institution.
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 represent the constituency.
9. A governing board that is sufficiently autonomous to protect the integrity of the institution.
10. Evidence for the ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the board and its members.
11. A process for orienting new board members and developing existing board members.
12. A process for providing updates for board members on issues relative to institutional mission, finances, and programs.
13. A chief executive officer appointed by, reporting to, and evaluated on a regular basis by the board, to provide administrative leadership for the institution.
14. Board policies and practices that clearly distinguish board and staff roles and that define the authority of the board and its limitations.
15. An effective board succession plan that ensures stability and new membership.

STANDARD 5

ADMINISTRATION

The institution has a core of administrators that brings together its various resources and allocates them to accomplish institutional goals by implementing policies and structures in collaboration with appropriate constituencies.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A chief executive officer whose primary employment/vocational responsibility is to the institution and who is responsible to the board in leading the institution toward the accomplishment of its mission.
2. A chief executive officer with the combination of academic background and professional experience appropriate to the institution's mission.
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. Complete, accurate, and securely maintained administrative records.
6. A procedure and practice for ongoing review and enhancement of the performance of administrators.

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.

[Policies to Reference: Policy on Institutions Sponsored by Other Organization]

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.
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.
 1. 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.

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.

[Applicable Policies: Principles of Good Practice in Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

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.

[Policies to Reference: 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.

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.

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 its faculty including the pursuit of terminal degrees.
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.

STANDARD 10

LIBRARY AND OTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

The institution ensures the availability of and access to learning resources and services of appropriate form, range, depth, and currency to support the curricular offerings and meet student and faculty needs, regardless of location or instructional delivery system.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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

1. A written learning resource purpose statement, consistent with the institutional mission and educational outcomes.
2. Appropriate written policies and procedures relating to the management of library and other learning resources.
3. Sufficient funding, staff, facilities, technology, and practices to procure and maintain needed learning resources and services for all instructional modalities used by the institution.
4. The availability of library services (reference, technical, and circulation) and other means of support to meet research and information needs of students and faculty.
5. Promotion to enhance student and faculty awareness of resources and services available.

6. Documentation of any participation in available library networks and/or cooperative arrangements that involve the use of other resources.
7. Joint participation of librarians and faculty in curriculum planning, the analysis of resource adequacy, the selection of resource materials, and the development of library policy.
8. Policies, procedures, and facilities that ensure access to and security of learning resources.
9. A collection of learning resources that is appropriate based on the curriculum, course offerings, age of resources, usage, and formats.
10. Effective leadership by a credentialed director who has faculty status and who normally reports to the chief academic officer.
11. Effective collaboration between the librarians and information technology personnel.
12. Evaluation of learning resource utilization by the learning community.
13. Curricular requirements, instruction, and reference services designed to teach information literacy skills to the learning community.

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 some programs oriented specifically to full-time vocational ministry but all programs enabling students to achieve a biblical worldview.

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 life-long 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 enables students to achieve a biblical worldview.
4. A curriculum taught with sensitivity to the cultural context in which students 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 Bible/theology component equivalent to 30 semester hours (45 quarter hours), 9 of which may be in interdisciplinary Bible related courses for a non-church related baccalaureate (13 quarter hours), 18 semester hours (27 quarter hours) of Bible/theology for a non-traditional degree completion program, and 12 semester hours (18 quarter hours) of Bible/theology for a one- or two-year program.
11. A core of general studies representative of the breadth of general studies and equivalent to 36 semester hours (54 quarter hours) for a baccalaureate degree or 18 semester hours (27 quarter hours) for an associate degree.
12. A core of professional studies equivalent to a minimum of 18 semester hours (27 quarter hours) (baccalaureate degrees only) and selected to equip students for professional positions.
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.

[Policies to Reference: 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]

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.

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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. Objectives consistent with the institution's mission and improved accessibility to learning opportunities.
2. Clearly defined learning outcomes that are designed, approved, administered and evaluated under established institutional procedures.
3. Standards for quality of instruction and academic rigor appropriate to the level of education offered.
4. Adequate staffing, facilities, and technology to support the programs.
5. 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.

[Policies to Reference: Alternative Academic Programs and Online Distance Education Best Practices (WCET); Guidelines for Sharing Online Courses]