

—An Overview—

Purpose and Philosophy of Accreditation

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is the regional body for the accreditation of higher education institutions in the southern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) and Latin America awarding associate, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degrees.

Accreditation of an institution by the Commission on Colleges signifies the institution has a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish that purpose on a continuing basis. Accreditation evaluates whether an institution maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers and whether it is successful in achieving its stated objectives.

The regulation of accreditation relates to a traditional U.S. philosophy—that a free people can and ought to govern themselves, which is done best through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions. Accreditation enhances educational quality throughout the region by improving the effectiveness of institutions and ensuring to the public that institutions meet standards established by the higher education community. Accreditation is a common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse range of institutions within the higher education community.

Both a process and a product, accreditation relies on integrity, thoughtful and principled judgment, the rigorous application of requirements, and a context of trust. It provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfillment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programs and services. Based upon reasoned judgment, the process serves to stimulate evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public.

The "product" of accreditation represents a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements. The statement of an institution's accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges is also an affirmation of an institution's continuing commitment to the Commission's principles and philosophy of accreditation.

The Commission on Colleges supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; and the right of students to opportunities for learning and the open exchange of ideas. However, the exercise of these rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

The fundamental characteristics of accreditation outlined by the Commission on Colleges are these:

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.

- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.
- Accreditation is a form of self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation is based upon an institutional commitment to student achievement.
- Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to provide evidence it is accomplishing its mission.
- Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governance structure designed to promote institutional autonomy and flexibility of operation.
- Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.

Principles of Accreditation

The first task of the Commission when considering an institution's accreditation status is to determine the institution's integrity and its commitment to quality enhancement. These two principles serve as the foundation of the relationship between the Commission and its member and candidate institutions.

Integrity

Integrity is a core value essential to the purpose of higher education, functioning as the basic social contract defining the relationship between the Commission and each of its member institutions. It is a relationship in which all parties agree to commit themselves to honesty and openness in their dealings with their constituencies and with one another. Without this commitment, no relationship can exist or be sustained between the Commission and its member institutions. The Commission's requirements, policies, processes, procedures, and decisions are predicated on integrity.

The Commission on Colleges expects integrity to govern the operation of institutions. Therefore, evidence of intentionally withholding information, deliberately providing inaccurate information to the public, or failing to provide timely information to the Commission will be construed as an indication of the lack of a full commitment to integrity and may result in the loss of membership in the Commission on Colleges.

Quality Enhancement

The Commission on Colleges expects institutions to dedicate themselves to enhancing the quality of their programs and services within the context of their missions, resources, and capacities, and creating an environment in which teaching, research, and learning occurs.

The concept of quality enhancement is at the heart of the Commission's philosophy of

accreditation; this presumes each member institution is engaged in an ongoing program of improvement and can demonstrate how well it fulfills its stated mission. Although evaluation of an institution's educational quality and its effectiveness in achieving its mission is a difficult task requiring careful analysis and professional judgment, an institution is expected to document quality and effectiveness in all its major aspects.

—An Organizational Overview—

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is a private, nonprofit, voluntary organization founded in 1895 in Atlanta, Georgia. The Association is comprised of the Commission on Colleges, the Commission on Secondary and Middle Schools, and the Commission on Elementary and Middle Schools. The three commissions carry out their missions with considerable autonomy, developing their own standards and procedures, and governing themselves by a delegate assembly. All three operate under the Association's board of trustees.

The College Delegate Assembly is comprised of one voting representative (the chief executive officer or the officer's designee) from each member institution. Its responsibilities include electing the 77-member Commission on Colleges to guide the organization's work, to approve all revisions in accrediting standards as recommended by the Commission, to approve the dues of candidate and member institutions as recommended by the Commission, and to elect an Appeals Committee to hear appeals of certain accreditation decisions.

As elected by the College General Assembly, the 77-member Commission on Colleges is responsible for preparing a statement on the standards for candidacy and membership; authorizing special visits; taking final action on the accreditation status of institutions based only on its published standards, policies, and procedures; nominating to the College Delegate Assembly persons to succeed those members of the Commission whose terms expire; electing an Executive Council of the Commission that will act for the Commission while it is not in session; appointing special study committees as needed; and approving the policies and procedures consistent with the Association's charter and bylaws.

The 13-member Executive Council is the executive arm of the Commission and functions on behalf of the Commission and the College Delegate Assembly between sessions. However, the actions of the Council are subject to the revision and approval of the Commission. The Council interprets Commission policies and procedures; develops procedures for and supervises the work of special and standing committees of the Commission; approves goals and objectives of the Commission; reviews and approves the Commission's budget; oversees and annually evaluates the work of its executive director; and initiates new programs, projects, and policy proposals.

The Council receives and acts on reports from all special and standing committees and submits them to the Commission. In the case of institutions applying for candidacy, membership, or reaffirmation of accreditation, the Executive Council receives recommendations from the Committees on Criteria and Reports, standing evaluation committees of the Commission, and in turn submits its recommendations on these institutions to the Commission for final action.

—The Process of Accreditation—

The process for initial and continued accreditation involves a collective analysis and judgment of an institution's internal constituencies, an informed review by peers external to the institution, and a reasoned decision by elected representatives to the Commission on Colleges.

Institutions accredited by the Commission periodically conduct internal reviews involving their administrative officers, staffs, faculties, students, trustees, and others appropriate to the process. The internal review provides an institution the opportunity to consider its effectiveness in achieving its stated mission and its compliance with the accreditation requirements established by the Commission's membership. Furthermore, it helps an institution to evaluate its efforts in enhancing the quality of student learning and the quality of programs and services offered to its constituencies as well as challenging itself in examining its successes in accomplishing its mission. At the culmination of the internal review, peers who represent the higher education community assess an institution's compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements and its efforts to enhance the quality of its programs and services.

Although peer evaluators representing the Commission apply their professional judgment in conducting a preliminary assessment of the institution, elected Commissioners make the final determination of an institution's compliance with the Commission's accreditation requirements.

The Application of the Requirements

The Commission on Colleges accredits degree-granting higher education institutions and entities based on requirements defined in its *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*. The requirements apply to all institutional programs and services, wherever located or however delivered. The *Principles of Accreditation* is designed to guide institutions in all stages of membership, from application through initial accreditation and reaffirmation of accreditation. Compliance with the requirements is intended to help an institution achieve overall effectiveness. The Commission on Colleges applies the requirements of its *Principles* to all applicant, candidate, and member institutions, regardless of the type of institution—private for-profit, private not-for-profit, or public.

The Commission evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on the following:

- Compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation* defined as integrity and commitment to quality enhancement.
- Compliance with the Core Requirements.
- Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards.
- Compliance with additional requirements related to participation in Title IV programs.

The Commission's philosophy of accreditation precludes denial of membership to a degree-granting institution of higher education on any ground other than an institution's failure to meet the above requirements in the professional judgment of peer reviewers.

Compliance with the Core Requirements for Candidacy and Membership

Compliance with the Core Requirements is essential for gaining and maintaining accreditation with the Commission on Colleges. The requirements establish a level of development required of an institution seeking initial or continued accreditation. Compliance with the Core Requirements is necessary but not sufficient to warrant accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. An applicant institution seeking candidacy with the Commission on Colleges is required to document compliance with Core Requirements 1–11 in order to be awarded candidacy or candidacy renewal. To gain or maintain accreditation, an institution must meet all Core Requirements, including Requirement 12. An institution responds to each Core Requirement by either confirming compliance or explaining those situations for which there is less than compliance.

Core Requirements 12 requires an institution to develop an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and show that the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process. Engaging the wider academic community, the QEP is based upon a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the learning environment for supporting student achievement and accomplishing the mission of the institution. It is used to outline a course of action for institutional improvement by addressing an issue—or issues—that contributes to institutional quality, with special attention to student learning.

Compliance with the Comprehensive Standards

The Comprehensive Standards set forth requirements in the following three areas: (1) institutional mission, governance, and effectiveness; (2) programs; and (3) resources. The Comprehensive Standards establish a necessary level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions. Institutions respond to each Comprehensive Standard either by confirming compliance or by explaining those situations that constitute less than compliance.

Guidelines pertaining to the academic and professional preparation of faculty function as the evidence the Commission normally would expect to be present when determining the overall quality of an institution. These are not Comprehensive Standards. Although Comprehensive Standards do not represent the only means by which institutions might make such determinations, they do represent the norms or commonly accepted standards of good practice within the larger community of the Commission's membership.

Compliance with Requirements Related to Participation in Title IV Programs

The U.S. Secretary of Education recognizes accreditation by the Commission on Colleges in establishing the eligibility of higher education institutions to participate in programs authorized under Title IV of the 1998 *Higher Education Amendments* and other federal programs. Through its compliance with these federal regulations, the Commission ensures the public that it is a reliable authority regarding the quality of education provided by its member institutions.

The federal statute includes mandates that the Commission review an institution in accord with criteria outlined in the regulations of the *Amendments* developed by the U.S. Department of Education. As part of the review process, institutions are required to document compliance with those criteria and the Commission is obligated to consider compliance when the institution is reviewed for initial membership or continued accreditation.

—Components of the Peer Review Process—

The Internal Review

The institution will provide three separate documents as part of its internal review.

1. *Expanded Annual Institutional Profiles*

The two annual profiles will be expanded to include currently requested information and address additional areas such as management and governance, enrollment trends, financial indicators, and program location and delivery.

2. *Compliance Certification*

During the eighth year following an institution's most recent reaffirmation, the Commission will request that it submit a completed compliance certification by a specified date. The certification will represent the institution's internal analysis of its compliance with each Core Requirement and Comprehensive Standard. Signatures by the institution's chief executive officer and accreditation liaison will be required to certify compliance. If an institution concludes it does not meet a specific requirement, it will stipulate its reasons for noncompliance and the actions necessary to make sure it comes into compliance.

3. *Quality Enhancement Plan*

The Commission will request submission of the Quality Enhancement Plan at the beginning of the tenth year. Engaging the wider academic community and addressing an issue or issues that contribute to institutional improvement, the plan should be focused, succinct, and limited in length (no more than seventy-five pages of narrative text and no more than twenty-five pages of support documentation or charts, graphs, and tables).

The External Review

1. *The Off-Site Peer Review*

A small committee of individuals will meet at an off-site location to review the institution's Compliance Certification and other support documentation it provides (i.e., expanded Institutional Profiles, financial audit reports, catalogs, and other information provided by the institution). The team will function as advisors to the on-site peer review committee by making observations about the information the institution provides and by determining an institution's compliance with standards.

2. *The On-Site Peer Review*

Following review by the off-site peer review committee, a team of peers will conduct a focused on-site review, the purpose of which will be to verify the institution's statement of its compliance with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards, evaluate actions proposed and/or taken regarding the institution's statements of noncompliance, evaluate the acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan, and provide consultation regarding issues addressed in the plan. At the conclusion of its visit, the on-site peer review committee will prepare a written report of its findings—noting areas of noncompliance—and will make a recommendation to the Commission on Colleges regarding the institution's accreditation status. The committee's report, along with the institution's response to areas of noncompliance, will be forwarded to the Commission for review and action.

—Institutional Responsibility for Reporting Substantive Change—

The Commission on Colleges accredits the entire institution and its programs and services, wherever they are located or however they are delivered. Accreditation is specific to an institution, is based on conditions existing at the time of the most recent evaluation, and is not transferable. When an accredited institution significantly modifies or expands its scope, or changes the nature of its affiliation or its ownership, a substantive change review is required. The Commission is responsible for evaluating all substantive changes that occur between an institution's decennial

reviews to determine whether the change has affected the quality of the total institution and to ensure the public that all aspects of the institution continue to meet defined standards.

A member institution is responsible for following the Commission's substantive change policy and its procedures by informing the Commission of such changes in accord with those procedures, and, when required, seeking approval prior to the initiation of the change. If an institution fails to follow the procedures, its total accreditation may be placed in jeopardy. (See "General Substantive Change Policy for Accredited Institutions" and "Procedure One" and "Procedure Two," outlining the types of substantive changes, their respective approval and notification requirements, and their reporting timelines.) If an institution is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, it should contact Commission staff for consultation.

An applicant or candidate institution may not undergo substantive change prior to action on initial membership.

—Representation of Status—

An institution must be accurate in reporting to the public its status and relationship with the Commission. In catalogs, brochures and advertisements, a **member institution** describes its relationship with the Commission only according with the following statement:

(Name of institution) is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award (name specific degree levels).

A **candidate institution** describes its relationship with the Commission only according to the following statement:

(Name of institution) is a candidate for accreditation with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award (name specific degree levels).

No statement may be made about the possible future accreditation status with the Commission on Colleges. Nor may an institution use the logo or seal of the Southern Association in any of its publications or documents.

Section II.

CORE REQUIREMENTS

For every Core Requirement mandating a policy or procedure, it is implicit that the policy or procedure is in writing, approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

For obtaining or maintaining accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must meet the following Core Requirements:

1. The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies.
2. The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Neither the presiding officer of the board nor the majority of other voting members of the board have contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.

A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board in which neither the presiding officer nor a majority of the other members are civilian employees of the military or active/retired military. The board has broad and significant influence upon the institution's programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Neither the presiding officer of the board nor the majority of other voting board members have contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.

3. The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board.
4. The institution has a clearly defined and published mission statement specific to the institution and appropriate to an institution of higher education, addressing teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service.
5. The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that incorporate a systematic review of programs and services that (a) results in continuing improvement and (b) demonstrates that the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.
6. The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs.
7. The institution
 - a. offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the

equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. The institution provides a written justification and rationale for program equivalency.

- b. offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated purpose and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.
 - c. offers a general education program at the collegiate level that is (1) a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts; social/behavioral sciences; and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The institution provides a written justification and rationale for course equivalency.
 - d. makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia, where appropriate. The institution itself, however, provides instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees, or provides an alternative approach to meeting this requirement. The alternative approach is approved by the Commission on Colleges. In all cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program.
8. The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution. The institution has adequate faculty resources to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs. In addition, upon application for candidacy, an applicant institution demonstrates that it meets the comprehensive standard for faculty qualifications.
9. The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections as well as to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. These collections and resources are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs.
10. The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.
11. The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability, and adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. The institution provides the following financial statements: (a) an institutional audit (as distinct from a systemwide or statewide audit) and management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant or an appropriate auditing agency employing the appropriate audit guide; (b) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board; and (c) a schedule of changes in unrestricted net assets, excluding plant and plant related-debt (short and long-term debt attached to physical assets).
12. The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan and demonstrates the plan is part of an ongoing planning and evaluation process.

Section III.

COMPREHENSIVE STANDARDS

For every Comprehensive Standard mandating a policy or procedure, it is implicit that the policy or procedure is in writing, approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

For obtaining or maintaining accreditation with the Commission on Colleges, an institution must meet the following Comprehensive Standards:

Institutional Mission, Governance, And Effectiveness

Institutional Mission

1. The institution has a clear and comprehensive mission statement that guides it; is approved by the governing board; is periodically reviewed by the board; and is communicated to the institution's constituencies.

Governance and Administration

2. The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and the evaluation of the chief executive officer.
3. The legal authority and operating control of the institution are clearly defined for the following areas within the institution's governance structure:
 - a. the institution's mission;
 - b. the fiscal stability of the institution;
 - c. institutional policy, including policies concerning related and affiliated corporate entities and all auxiliary services;
 - d. related foundations (athletic, research, etc.) and other corporate entities whose primary purpose is to support the institution and/or its programs.
4. The board has a policy addressing conflict of interest.
5. The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious, or other external bodies, and protects the institution from such influence.
6. Members of the governing board can be dismissed only for cause and by due process.
7. There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy.

8. The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies.
9. The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience, competence, and capacity to lead the institution.
10. The institution defines and publishes policies regarding appointment and employment of faculty and staff.
11. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators, including the chief executive officer, on a periodic basis.
12. The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for, and exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over, the institution's intercollegiate athletics program.
13. The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate control of the institution's fund-raising activities.
14. An institution-related foundation, not controlled by the institution, has a contractual or other formal agreement that (a) accurately describes the relationship between the institution and the foundation, and (b) describes any liability associated with that relationship. In all cases, the institution ensures that the relationship is consistent with its mission.
15. The institution's policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of all intellectual property. This applies to students, faculty and staff.

Institutional Effectiveness

16. The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

PROGRAMS

Educational Programs

Standards for All Educational Programs*

1. The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is (a) approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes.
2. The institution's continuing education, outreach, and service programs are consistent with the institution's mission.

* *Includes all on-campus, off-campus, and distance learning programs.*

3. The institution publishes admissions policies consistent with its mission.
4. The institution has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures that course work and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution's own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution's transcript.
5. The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution.
6. The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery.
7. The institution ensures the quality of educational programs/courses offered through consortia relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the comprehensive requirements, and evaluates the agreement against the purpose of the institution.
8. The institution awards academic credit for course work taken on a noncredit basis only when there is documentation that the noncredit course work is equivalent to a designated credit experience.
9. The institution provides appropriate academic support services.
10. The institution defines and publishes general education and major program requirements for all its programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for undergraduate programs as well as graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs.
11. The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student academic records and maintains special security measures to protect and back up data.
12. The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty.
13. For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration.
14. The institution's use of technology enhances student learning, is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs, and ensures that students have access to and training in the use of technology.

Standards Specific to Undergraduate Programs

15. The institution identifies competencies within the general education core and provides evidence that graduates have attained those college-level competencies.
16. The institution awards degrees only to those students who have earned at least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree through instruction offered by that institution.

Standards Specific to Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs

17. The institution's post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, and its master's and doctoral degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs.
18. The institution ensures that its graduate instruction and resources foster independent learning, enabling the graduate to contribute to a profession or field of study.
19. The majority of credits toward a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree is earned through the institution awarding the degree. In the case of graduate and post-baccalaureate professional degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns a majority of credits from the participating institutions.

Faculty

20. The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline in accord with the guidelines listed below. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of all its faculty.

Credential Guidelines:

- a. *Faculty teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level: a doctoral or a master's degree in the teaching discipline or a master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).*
- b. *Faculty teaching associate degree courses designed for transfer to a baccalaureate degree: a doctoral or a master's degree in the teaching discipline or a master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).*
- c. *Faculty teaching associate degree courses not designed for transfer to the baccalaureate degree: a baccalaureate degree in the teaching discipline, or an associate degree and demonstrated competencies in the teaching discipline.*
- d. *Faculty teaching baccalaureate degree courses: a doctoral or a master's degree in the teaching discipline or a master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline). At least 25 percent of the discipline course hours in each undergraduate major are taught by faculty members holding the terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate—in the discipline.*
- e. *Faculty teaching graduate and post-baccalaureate course work: earned doctorate/terminal degree in the teaching discipline or a related discipline.*

- f. *Graduate teaching assistants: master's in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations.*
21. The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.
 22. The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.
 23. The institution ensures adequate procedures for the safeguard and protection of academic freedom.
 24. The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters.

Library and Other Learning Resources

25. The institution provides facilities, services, and other learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission.
26. The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources.
27. The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff--with appropriate education or experiences both in library or other learning/information resources--to accomplish the mission of the institution.

Student Affairs and Services

28. The institution publishes a clear and appropriate statement of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement to the campus community.
29. The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records.
30. The institution provides services supporting its mission with qualified personnel to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its student affairs programs.

RESOURCES

Financial and Physical Resources

1. The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability.
2. The institution provides financial statements and related documents, including multiple measures for determining financial health as requested by the Commission, which accurately and appropriately represent the total operation of the institution.

3. The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations.
4. The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial and physical resources.
5. The institution maintains financial control over externally funded or sponsored research and programs.
6. The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community.
7. The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that are adequate to serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and mission-related activities.

Section IV.

FEDERAL MANDATES

In addition to the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards outlined above that have incorporated some of the requirements mandated by the *1998 Higher Education Amendments* and its attending regulations, institutions also are responsible for complying with the following requirements that are more specifically stated in federal laws. Compliance will be considered when the institution is reviewed for initial membership and for continued accreditation.

1. When evaluating success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, the institution includes, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.
2. The institution maintains a curriculum that is directly related and appropriate to the purpose and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates or degrees awarded.
3. The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies.
4. The institution demonstrates that program length is appropriate for each of the degrees offered.
5. The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (See Commission policy "The Review of Complaints Involving the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.")
6. Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies.
7. The institution publishes the name of its primary accreditor and its address and phone number. (The publication of this information is presented so that it is clear that inquiries to the Commission should relate only to the accreditation status of the institution, and not to general admission information.)
8. The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the *1998 Higher Education Amendments*. (In reviewing the institution's compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on documentation forwarded to it by the Secretary of Education.) (***Applies only to those institutions receiving Title IV funding.***)