



Principles of Accreditation

The Standards for Accreditation and Reaffirmation

(Note: Standards with a * indicate that they are fully or in part aligned with Department of Education requirements or are recommended by AIM to be included in the Federal standards.)

Institutional Stability

1. Integrity

The institution operates with integrity in all matters.

***2. Institutional Mission**

The institution has a clearly defined and published educational mission, appropriate to the institution and credentials offered.

3. Governance

3.1 Shared Governance

The institution publishes shared governance policies and procedures that (a) are clearly articulated, effectively communicated, and consistently followed, and (b) ensure a clear and appropriate distinction between the function of the board and the respective responsibilities of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy.

3.2 Governing Authority

The institution has a governing authority (for example, a governing board) responsible for the institution's quality, integrity, and financial stability and for ensuring that its mission is accomplished. To that end, the institution demonstrates that the board (a) exercises appropriate oversight, including fiduciary duties, (b) hires and evaluates the institution's CEO, (c) focuses on creating and approving governing policies, (d) protects institutional autonomy from undue influence, and (e) adheres to ethical standards.

***4. Chief Executive Officer and Administrative Capacity**

The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to lead the institution in fulfilling its mission and to ensure the achievement of student success. The institution demonstrates that (a) the CEO and administrative leadership team possess the qualifications and authority necessary to execute institutional responsibilities effectively and (b) the CEO's roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to support mission fulfillment and student achievement.

5. Sound Institutional Planning

The institution demonstrates systematic, integrated, and data-informed multi-year planning to enhance institutional effectiveness and ensure long-term sustainability and mission fulfillment. Planning includes (a) an approved plan with clearly articulated goals consistent with the institution's mission, (b) a regular review of the plan to determine the institution's progress toward attainment of its goals, (c) a deliberate connection between the plan and an institutional financial plan grounded in realistic and clearly documented revenue and expenditure assumptions, and (d) engagement with appropriate stakeholders.

***6. Financial Stability**

The institution (a) demonstrates financial stability with sufficient financial resources for operations by providing multiple years of audited or independently reviewed financial statements and appropriate supplementary documentation, (b) demonstrates that it utilizes sound budgeting practices, and (c) operates with appropriate financial controls to ensure accurate and reliable financial management.

***7. Control and Oversight of External Funds and Regulatory Compliance**

Responsible stewardship of external funding and compliance with program responsibilities protect the institution's fiscal integrity and regulatory standing. The institution demonstrates that it (a) exercises appropriate financial control and oversight of externally funded and sponsored programs, (b) complies with all applicable federal and state program responsibilities, and (c) complies with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent Higher Education Act as amended, including required audits of Title IV and other financial aid programs.

***8. Facilities, Infrastructure, and Safety**

The institution demonstrates that it (a) provides adequate physical facilities and infrastructure to support its mission, (b) takes reasonable steps to ensure a

healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community, and (c) provides information on investigations by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights into alleged sexual violence.

Quality Education

***9. Undergraduate Curriculum (General Education)**

The institution's educational programs include a general education component that (a) addresses foundational knowledge, skills, and competencies that support lifelong learning, informed citizenship, and preparation for future employment and career adaptability, (b) is based on a coherent rationale, (c) constitutes a substantial component of required credit hours for the undergraduate degree, and (d) provides a breadth of knowledge across several disciplines beyond what is required in the major.

***10. Academic Program Content**

The institution demonstrates that, at all credential levels, its academic programs (a) align with the institutional mission, (b) are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education, (c) embody a coherent course of study, (d) demonstrate a logical progression of higher-order thinking, including progressively more advanced academic content and skills development for graduate and post-baccalaureate professional programs, and (e) are designed and revised with faculty input.

***11. Alignment with Workforce Needs**

Strengthening the connection between education and employment ensures that higher education remains relevant and prepares students for future careers. The institution (a) has a process for reviewing its educational programs and transferable career competencies to strengthen their alignment with industry standards and workforce needs and (b) uses that evaluation to inform the curriculum.

***12. Definition of Credit Hour and Alternative Approaches**

The institution (a) makes public its definition of a "credit hour" and implements policies for governing the amount and level of credit awarded for its courses, regardless of programs not based on credit hours (e.g., direct assessment

programs) and (b) provides an explanation of the equivalencies and includes the objectives of the credential offered.

***13. Program Length**

At all credential levels, the institution demonstrates that its programs are of a length to ensure (a) achievement of the program's student learning outcomes and (b) conformity to commonly accepted standards for the granting of the credential. Additionally, the institution (c) demonstrates that combined degree programs or reduced credit-hour programs are based upon the assessment of clear and evidence-based competencies.

***14. Transfer Credits**

The institution (a) publishes and implements policies for evaluating and accepting credit not originating from the institution, (b) has processes designed to support the ease of transfer to and from other institutions, and (c) has an approval process with involvement from persons qualified to make necessary judgments, including determining academic quality. Additionally, the institution ensures (d) the credit awarded is comparable to a designated credit experience and is consistent with the institution's mission and (e) that policies address credit awarded based on prior academic or non-academic learning, experiential learning, competency-based assessments, and other alternative learning approaches.

***15. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

For each of its educational programs, the institution (a) identifies specific, measurable student learning outcomes which describe the knowledge, skills, or competencies students are expected to achieve upon successful completion, (b) periodically reviews program-level student-learning outcomes to ensure they remain current, relevant, and, where applicable, aligned with professional standards, licensure or certification requirements, and (c) provides examples of the periodic processes used to determine whether students are achieving the identified program outcomes.

***16. Distance, Correspondence, and Direct Assessment**

The institution that offers distance, correspondence, or direct assessment education demonstrates (a) the quality and integrity of these offerings, (b) affirms the inclusion of these offerings under all appropriate standards and policies included in the compliance submissions, (c) that the student who registers for a

distance or correspondence course is the same student who participates in and receives credit for the course, and (d) that students are notified at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional expenses associated with verification of their identity.

17. Institutional Credits for Graduation

The institution demonstrates that at least 25% of the credit hours required for undergraduate credentials and 33% of the credit hours required for graduate-level degrees are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding that credential. Institutions making an exception to the credit hours required will provide an explanation.

***18. Research Integrity**

The institution demonstrates that it (a) implements policies and documents procedures that promote sound research practices among faculty, staff, and students engaged in research activity and (b) provides internal mechanisms for identifying and remediating questionable research practices that are inconsistent with discipline-specific and professional norms.

***19. Sufficient Faculty to Deliver Quality Programs**

The institution implements policies and procedures to ensure that its educational programs are sufficiently supported by qualified faculty who assure program quality, content currency, and assessment of learning effectiveness.

***20. Faculty Qualifications and Evaluation**

The institution demonstrates that it (a) implements policies and documents procedures for approval of faculty qualifications that support a high-quality learning experience for students at all credential levels. In instances where an exception to policy is made, the institution (b) provides a clear rationale for the exception and documents the decision-making process, including the alternative credentials or experiences accepted. Additionally, (c) the faculty are regularly evaluated on the performance of their roles or defined performance criteria as established by the institution.

***21. Academic Freedom**

The institution publishes and implements clearly articulated policies and procedures for preserving and protecting the faculty's academic freedom.

Student Success

***22. Student Success and Achievement for Institutions and Programs**

The institution (a) identifies measures of student success and achievement, disaggregated based upon the mission and nature of the students it serves. The institution and its programs (inclusive of distance, correspondence, and direct assessments) (b) select a key student completion indicator and additional measures of student achievement drawn from multiple categories so that no single metric stands in for overall performance, (c) evaluate and report success on progress toward achievements, and (d) implement strategies to strengthen student success where possible.

***23. Student and Academic Support Services**

Student and academic support services provide essential scaffolding necessary for student success and attainment of the institutional mission. The institution provides (a) academic and student support services appropriate to the students it serves, (b) library, learning, and information resources and services consistent with the mission, (c) information and guidance to assist students in understanding debt, loan repayment, and financial management, and (d) assistance to students with post-completion transitions appropriate to the programs offered.

***24. Student Rights and Written Complaints**

The institution has broadly disseminated clear, appropriate, and published (a) statements of student rights and responsibilities and (b) procedures for addressing student written complaints. The institution (c) demonstrates that it fairly administers those policies and procedures when resolving student complaints and (d) maintains a record of student complaints that The Commission can access upon request.

***25. Intellectual Pluralism**

The institution (a) publishes policies designed to support, promote, and prioritize intellectual diversity and affirm the respectful, civil exchange of ideas and viewpoints and (b) periodically measures student and faculty perceptions on the range of viewpoints and perspectives offered by the institution or program.

***26. Protection of Privacy and Integrity of Student Records**

The institution demonstrates that it takes reasonable measures to protect the privacy, security, and integrity of students' records.

***27. Transparency in Admissions and Institutional Representation**

The institution (a) publishes and implements admissions policies consistent with its mission, (b) publishes advertising materials and provides recruitment materials that accurately represent the institution's programs and admissions practices and policies, and (c) ensures that independent agents or contractors used for recruiting purposes and for admission activities are governed by the same principles and policies as institutional employees.

***28. Publicly Disclosed Information**

The institution provides evidence that academic calendars, grading policies, cost of attendance, refund policies, and academic catalogs are published, accurate, and accessible to meet the needs of prospective, current, and former students.

***29. Accreditation Status and Reporting Changes**

The institution (a) accurately represents its accreditation status and publishes the name, address, telephone number, and website address of SACSCOC in accordance with SACSCOC requirements and federal policy; and (b) ensures that all its branch campuses include the name of that institution and make clear that their accreditation depends on the parent campus's continued accreditation.

***30. Representation to Other Agencies**

The institution (a) represents itself accurately to all U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agencies with which it holds accreditation and (b) informs The Commission and other agencies of any change of accreditation status, including the imposition of public sanctions.

31. Compliance with New Policy or Obligations

The institution complies with Commission policy statements that pertain to new or additional institutional obligations that may arise, including Substantive Change requirements that are not part of the standards in the current Principles of Accreditation.