

Accreditation Review

*The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)*

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EDU 6234: Program Evaluation, Assessment and Accreditation in Higher Education

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The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as an accrediting body serving over 200 post-secondary institutions around the world. It primarily serves as the regional accrediting body for the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Previously, NECHE was a part of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The separation of NECHE from NEASC was formalized in late 2018.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss broadly how NECHE operates and if it does so effectively. A review of the organization, its policies and procedures, data collection processes, and standards is conducted. Then its strengths, weaknesses, and impact are analyzed. A personal reflection of this project forms the conclusion of this paper. Where noted in each section, relevant documentation provided by NECHE is included in an appendix at the end of this paper.

## **Review of NECHE**

### **NECHE Policies and Procedures**

Not all policies and procedures (P&Ps) are made public facing; however, NECHE currently has sixty-one P&Ps on their website. Based on their number system, they have at least 165 outlined P&Ps. Currently, they are broken into the following categories: candidacy, comments and complaints, commission practices, institutional effectiveness, substantive change, information about selected substantive changes, branch campuses, overseas programs, distance education, competency-based education, correspondence education, and transfer of credit. Commission practices has the largest selection of publicly available P&Ps, with twenty-seven total (NECHE, 2022b).

Of note, there are a few P&Ps that deal specifically with standard compliance and institutional review under the category of commission practices. “Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions” (filed as NECHE Pp43) defines accreditation as “a continuing status” the includes periodic reviews for the benefit of the institution and for the “fulfillment of the Commission’s accountability to

the academic community and to the public” (NECHE, 2021c). More details on this policy will be outline in the following section, as it pertains to instruments and data collection methods.

Should an institution falter in its commitment to maintaining NECHE standards, the “Policy on Notation” (filed as NECHE Pp60) discusses the process of notification of a probationary status. This notation is made public, and delivered when the commission determines that such decline should be public knowledge. The commission monitors the institution closely for two years to assess areas of identified concern; if the institution has successfully addressed items identified in the notation, the notation will be removed. However, should an institution does not meet one or more standards, they are required to defend their accreditation status to the commission and may be issued a continued notation. A notation necessitates a meeting of the commission staff with institutional leadership, including but not limited to the president and chair of the governing board. An institution is required to disclose a notation within seven days of receipt on its website (NECHE, 2021b)

If an institution anticipates circumstances beyond its control that could affect its ability to meet the standards set by the commission, there is the potential to request a period of noncompliance, as outlined in the “Policy on Noncompliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures” (filed as NECHE Pp 165). The commission has identified several circumstances in which an institution might have difficulty fulfilling its obligations in a non-exhaustive list that includes natural disaster or other catastrophic events, local or national economic changes, changing licensure requirements, etc. The formal request for a period of noncompliance must include the circumstances and particular standards or policies involved, evidence that the time allotted would allow an institution to achieve compliance, and a justification based in evidence that noncompliance will not jeopardize the quality of the institution or create undue hardship for students (NECHE, 2020). The timing of this P&P (March 2020) suggests that it was established and published as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Copies of these three policies are included in Appendix II.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Methods Used by Neche**

NECHE relies heavily on self-assessment and data collections from institutions themselves. As outlined in the “Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions,” the nature and timing of review varies to circumstances at a given institution; furthermore, the commission utilizes several different mechanisms for periodic review (NECHE, 2021c). All forms and documents are required to be submitted as a single searchable PDF that includes all required appendices to the NECHE institution portal (NECHE, 2021a).

“At least once every ten years all institutions must undergo a comprehensive evaluation against the full array of the Commission’s standards and policies for the purpose of reaffirming institutional accreditation” (NECHE, 2021c). This evaluation includes three components: (1) a self-study in which the institution evaluates if and how it met NECHE standards, (2) an on-site evaluation conducted by faculty and administrators from peer institutions, and (3) a review and decision from NECHE (NECHE, 2022a).

The self-study includes information related to the background of the institution, high level characteristics and a brief overview of the institution. Furthermore, the narrative portion of this self-study is 100 pages and includes data entered into “Data First Forms,” an extensive Excel template that covers data across all standards (NECHE, 2022a) and is organized to each subpoint within the many dimensions outlined in the next section of this paper.

In addition to the comprehensive evaluation, institutions are required to submit an interim report with current information as it relates to student learning or major developments since the last comprehensive evaluation. This typically happens during year five out of a ten-year cycle. Annually, institutions are also asked to submit a report that includes statistical data on enrollment, finances, off-campus programming, distance education, contractual relationships, student learning outcomes and any major developments in the past year (NECHE, 2021c).

Data collected for any of these reports relies on self-reporting and is usually compiled for the commission using their Excel templates. Actual collection of related data points for submission varies from institution to institution based on organizational structure and internal tools utilize by each institution. These reports are then utilized by the on-site evaluation team to validate findings through their campus visit. Using the self-study and information gathered through the visit, the evaluation team chair prepares a report for the commission to utilize in their review. The institution is allowed to see this report and submit a response that either indicates alignment with the findings or offer other perspective to this data. The commission takes all collected files, data points, and public comment into consideration when determining an institution's accreditation status (NECHE, 2022a).

Copies of the "Data First Forms" for standards 5.1, 5.2 ,5.3, and 5.4 can be found in Appendix II. These are but a few of the many forms included in the process of data collection.

### **NECHE Standards: Nine Dimensions of a Quality Institution**

NECHE has defined its standards as related to the following matters, therein defined as "dimensions": (1) mission and purposes, (2) planning and evaluation, (3) organization and governance, (4) the academic program, (5) students, (6) teaching, learning, and scholarship, (7) institutional resources, (8) educational effectiveness, and (9) integrity, transparency, and public disclosure (NECHE, 2021d). Each of these nine categories contains several guidelines for institutions to follow if they wish to meet these standards. The dimension with the longest and most detailed set of guidelines is the academic program, containing 49 points and further organized by seven subheadings.

Because these standards represent small parts and dimensions of the overall quality of an institution, they are inherently interrelated; therefore, considerations in one standard may have application in others. Broadly speaking, these standards seek to determine if an institution "has clearly defined purposes appropriate to an institution of higher learning; has assembled and organized those

resources necessary to achieve its purposes; is achieving its purposes; [and] has the ability to continue to achieve its purposes” (NECHE, 2021d).

Perhaps most notably is that the standards set by NECHE contain a preamble, in which self-regulation is described extensively. The development of these dimensions of quality and their related standards was only made possible through collaboration of member institutions. NECHE engages in evaluations of the effectiveness of its own standards periodically. The standards referenced in this paper were made effective as of January 1, 2021. In this way, the standards for accreditation and the standards for membership serve each other in a cycle: this system is based on the idea that an institution agrees to uphold these standards to maintain membership, and members participate in the evaluation of the standards of NECHE.

A complete copy of the standards for accreditation as set by NECHE are in Appendix I.

### **Analysis and Critique of NECHE**

#### **Strengths and Weaknesses of NECHE**

The self-study portion of the accreditation process is a great strength. NECHE’s clearly defined and outlined policies and standards make it very clear exactly what data points are being discussed, how each item should be evaluated for effectiveness, and where and how to report all related data points. From a high-level viewpoint, everything that falls within the purview of NECHE is clear, well organized, and contains useful information for an institution to consider.

Regardless of accreditation outcome, an institution that spends the time and energy to collect, analyze, and compile detail for reflection is an institution that must examine itself from multiple perspectives; therefore, to engage in self-study and the process of accreditation has value in and of itself. Self-study practices also allow the public to engage in a voluntary and transparent process of external review of institutions and keeps them accountable to generally accepted standards from nationally recognized accrediting bodies like NECHE (CHEA, 2010).

However, the self-study portion of this accreditation process is also a weakness. By relying on an institution to collect data on its own practices and outcomes rather than relying on external evaluating of that data, potential loopholes and work arounds are created. As an example of this, the Northeastern NUIIn program, where first year students spend their first semester abroad, allows the university to report about the incoming class to the US News and NECHE differently than peer organizations: all NUIIn students are considered transfer students to the institution when they arrive on campus during their second semester of their first year. This means that the demographic of the student body as well as the size of the class can be manipulated by the university in order to change the perception by external bodies, even when the intention is to admit more students than reported on a conditional status.

Though many, if not most, accrediting bodies across the United States rely on a self-study or similar methodology to conduct their accreditation process (CHEA, 2010; Eaton, 2015), self-study can be an inhibitive practice for educators who “do not see self-study as a part of their professional work” (Myers, 1995); furthermore, many educators—both staff and faculty—view the writing of such a report as a complex and time consuming activity (Van Kemenade, E., & Hardjono, 2010). Even with putting in all the time and effort to be transparent for the public, as defined by NECHE and CHEA as goals of accreditation, self-study is more useful for an organization to improve rather than for effective external validation and accountability (Van Kemenade, E., & Hardjono, 2010).

### **NECHE’s Impact**

An institution that has accredited status is a symbol to the public and to the student body that an institution lives up to its promises, particularly in areas of employment, student aid, transferring credits, reliable and accountable improvement efforts, etc. (CHEA, 2010). Even still, some concern about the impact accreditation has on institutions that continue accreditation rather than seek to be accredited for the first time; improvement at institutions are seen most in newly accredited institutions, with continuing accredited institutions plateauing (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018).

Regardless of this strength and weakness of self-study, the impact of accreditation through NECHE is observable. A great example of this lies with the recent withdrawal of accreditation of Bay State College, effective August 31, 2023 (Schall, 2023). Many who considered attending the institution now turn to other schools so that they can graduate with a degree from an accredited program; Bay State itself is giving transfer options to those students who would graduate past August. This even worked its way into political spaces, with both Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Rep. Ayanna Pressley asking NECHE to hold Bay State accountable (Bauer-Wolf, 2023). NECHE has a great deal of influence on the higher education space for professionals and the way the public observes and participates in higher education in the Northeast.

A copy of the Public Statement on Bat State College is included in Appendix II.

### **Assignment Reflection**

This assignment was useful for my professional growth and personal curiosity. As a staff member at Northeastern University, I engage in the accreditation process by gathering data and documents for an academic program. I am greatly familiar with the duties I have in this process, but was not particularly familiar with the formal processes of NECHE. I almost mentioned this as a weakness of the organization, but something that surprised me is the lack of publicly available guidance for institutions on how to utilize NECHE processes to the fullest; specifically, guides from NECHE for staff collecting data in the way that I do would be incredibly useful. Instead, NECHE relies on the institution to be a middle manager in its reporting structure.

In this way, I enjoyed being able to see what my work was going to and why it was being evaluated. I feel much more confident in my ability to conduct this work and ask further questions of my colleagues at Northeastern in the hopes to use this accreditation process to its fullest potential. On the other hand, this assignment felt very similar to a school report I might have done outside of graduate school. While this information was useful to examine and think on critically, I found that discussing



accreditation processes and organizations with my peers to be more enjoyable than collecting a report. Perhaps instead a comparative analysis of accreditation processes from one body to another might have been more engaging—though perhaps since many bodies use the same general methods as outlined by CHEA, that assignment might not accomplish the same as our Zoom discussions do.

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Van Kemenade, E., & Hardjono, T. W. (2010). A critique of the use of self-evaluation in a compulsory accreditation system. *Quality in Higher Education, 16*(3), 257–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2010.506715>

## Appendix I

This appendix includes links to relevant pages on NECHE's website, mentioned in this paper and included in the citation list.

- Home Page: <https://www.neche.org/>
- About NECHE: <https://www.neche.org/about-neche/>
- Policies and Procedures: <https://www.neche.org/resources/policies-procedures/>
- Standards: <https://www.neche.org/resources/standards-for-accreditation>
- Roster of Institutions: <https://www.neche.org/about-neche/roster-of-institutions/>

## Appendix II

This appendix includes previously mentioned documents as published by NECHE for reference. In order of appearance, the documents are as follows:

- NECHE Pp43: Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions
- NECHE Pp60: Policy on Notation
- NECHE Pp165: Policy on Noncompliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures
- Data First: Standard 5.1
- Data First: Standard 5.2
- Data First: Standard 5.3
- Data First: Standard 5.4
- NECHE Standards
- Public Statement on Bay State College

## **Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions**

Accreditation is viewed by the New England Commission of Higher Education as a continuing status that, once confirmed, is removed only for cause and then with scrupulous observance of procedural fairness. A responsible accrediting program necessarily includes periodic review of accredited institutions both for their benefit and for the fulfillment of the Commission's accountability to the academic community and to the public. The nature and timing of such reviews vary in accordance with the circumstances at a given institution and with the Commission's judgment as to how it can best serve the institution's needs while simultaneously meeting its broader responsibilities.

At its best, the periodic review of accredited institutions is a creative means of assisting them in the continuous assessment of their educational objectives and their success in fulfilling institutional goals. The more self-study and evaluation are seen as directly related to institutional viability and quality, the more productive the self-study and evaluation process will be.

The Commission utilizes a variety of mechanisms to review periodically the accreditation status of member institutions. At least once every ten years all institutions must undergo a comprehensive evaluation against the full array of the Commission's standards and policies for the purpose of reaffirming institutional accreditation. For newly accredited institutions the interval between comprehensive evaluations does not exceed five years. Preceded by institutional self-study, these evaluations are undertaken by committees of visitors whose findings and recommendations are reviewed by the Commission.

Between comprehensive evaluations, institutions are required to submit an interim report, typically at the fifth year of a ten-year evaluation cycle. These reports provide a current overview of the institution with respect to the *Standards for Accreditation*, a reflective essay about student learning, and major developments or changes since the previous evaluation. Included is the institution's response to the concerns and recommendations resulting from the last evaluation. The institution is also asked to provide a summary of its plans for the period prior to the next comprehensive evaluation.

Annually, every institution is required to submit a report that provides not only statistical data related to such matters as enrollment and finances but also information about off-campus programming, distance education, contractual relationships, student learning

outcomes, and any significant developments at the institution in the past year that may have a bearing on its accredited status.

At its discretion, the Commission may and often does require from individual institutions reports on specified topics. This focused report may be followed by a limited on-site evaluation for the purpose of validating the contents of the report.

If an institution undergoes significant change or if at any time its ability to meet one or more of the Commission's standards is seriously questioned, the Commission reserves the right to review that institution's accreditation without regard to any previously indicated time pattern.

*September, 1982*

*November 2003*

*November 2012*

*Editorial changes: August 2021*

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## Policy on Notation

The Commission will impose a Notation when it determines that the public should be notified when conditions at an institution with respect to the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* are such that the institution's candidacy or accreditation may be in jeopardy if current conditions continue or worsen.

An institution issued a Notation will be closely monitored by the Commission, including a focused evaluation within two years to assess the institution's success in addressing the identified concerns. If the Notation is for *Institutional Resources*, the visit will include a review of the institution's teach-out plans and agreements and its academic records for students and alumni/ae to assess the policies and procedures in place with respect to the retention, safety and security, and disposal of those records.

If the Commission finds the institution has successfully addressed the concerns, it will remove the Notation and specify further monitoring. If the Commission has reason to believe that the institution may or may not meet one or more *Standards for Accreditation*, the Commission will ask the institution to show cause why it should not be on probation or why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. If the Commission finds that the concerns have not been sufficiently addressed, the Commission may issue a continued Notation.

The Notation will be communicated to the institution by letter, a copy of which will be sent to the Executive Committee of the institution's governing board. Commission staff will ask to meet within 90 days with broad-based representation of the institution's leadership, including the President and the chair of the governing board.

After formal communication to the institution, the Commission will make the Notation public, including to the relevant state agency or ministry. Within seven days of receipt of written notice that it has been issued a Notation, the institution is obliged to disclose this information on its website.

*November 2018*  
*Revised November 2020*  
*Editorial Changes August 2021*



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## **Policy on Noncompliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures**

The Commission expects that institutions will remain in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and its policies and procedures. However, it appreciates that occasionally there are circumstances beyond the institution's control where, for a period of time, the institution may be out of compliance with one or more standards, policies, and procedures. Examples of such circumstances include:

- 1) a natural disaster or other catastrophic event significantly impacting an institution's or program's operations;
- 2) accepting students from another institution that is implementing a teach-out or closing;
- 3) significant and documented local or national economic changes, such as an economic recession or closure of a large local employer;
- 4) changes relating to State licensure requirements; or
- 5) the normal application of the agency's standards creates an undue hardship on students.

An institution that finds itself in one of these circumstances may make a written request to the Commission for approval for a period of noncompliance. Institutions considering a request for approval of a period of noncompliance are encouraged to discuss the matter with Commission staff.

The report prepared by an institution requesting approval for a period of non-compliance should include the following:

- 1) a description of the circumstances that led to the noncompliance;
- 2) an indication of the standards, policies, and/or procedures with which the institution is noncompliant;
- 3) evidence that the institution has the resources necessary to achieve compliance with the standards, policies, and/or procedures within the time allotted; and
- 4) evidence that the period of noncompliance will not
  - a) Contribute to the cost of the program to the student without the student's consent;
  - b) Create any undue hardship on, or harm to, students; or
  - c) Compromise the quality of the institution's academic programs.

In approving an institution's request, the Commission will specify a time period for non-compliance not to exceed three years and will specify ongoing monitoring during the period of non-compliance, to include at least a report, annually, of the institution's progress in bringing itself back into compliance. The Commission may, for good cause, extend the period of non-compliance beyond three years.

Approval of a period of noncompliance with Commission standards, policies, or procedures does not affect the subsequent schedule of Commission reviews for the institution.

*March 2020*

**Standard 5: Students**  
**(Admissions, Fall Term)**

Complete this form for each distinct student body identified by the institution (see Standard 5.1)

?

Credit Seeking Students Only - Including Continuing Education

		3 Years Prior (FY 2 )	2 Years Prior (FY 2 )	1 Year Prior (FY 2 )	Current Year (FY 2 )	Goal (specify year) (FY 2 )
<b>Freshmen - Undergraduate</b>	?					
Completed Applications	?					
Applications Accepted	?					
Applicants Enrolled	?					
% Accepted of Applied		-	-	-	-	-
% Enrolled of Accepted		-	-	-	-	-
Percent Change Year over Year						
Completed Applications		na	-	-	-	-
Applications Accepted		na	-	-	-	-
Applicants Enrolled		na	-	-	-	-
Average of statistical indicator of aptitude of enrollees: (define below)	?					
<b>Transfers - Undergraduate</b>	?					
Completed Applications						
Applications Accepted						
Applications Enrolled						
% Accepted of Applied		-	-	-	-	-
% Enrolled of Accepted		-	-	-	-	-
<b>Master's Degree</b>	?					
Completed Applications						
Applications Accepted						
Applications Enrolled						
% Accepted of Applied		-	-	-	-	-
% Enrolled of Accepted		-	-	-	-	-
<b>First Professional Degree</b>	?					
Completed Applications						
Applications Accepted						
Applications Enrolled						
% Accepted of Applied		-	-	-	-	-
% Enrolled of Accepted		-	-	-	-	-
<b>Doctoral Degree</b>	?					
Completed Applications						
Applications Accepted						
Applications Enrolled						
% Accepted of Applied		-	-	-	-	-
% Enrolled of Accepted		-	-	-	-	-

Please enter any explanatory notes in the box below

## Standard 5: Students (Enrollment, Fall Term)

Complete this form for each distinct student body identified by the institution (see Standard 5.1)

?

Credit-Seeking Students Only - Including Continuing Education

		3 Years Prior (FY 2 )	2 Years Prior (FY 2 )	1 Year Prior (FY 2 )	Current Year (FY 2 )	Goal (specify year) (FY 2 )
<b>UNDERGRADUATE</b>						
First Year	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
Second Year	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
Third Year	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
Fourth Year	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
Unclassified	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
Total Undergraduate Students						
	Full-Time Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Part-Time Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE	0	0	0	0	0
	% Change FTE Undergraduate	na	-	-	-	-
<b>GRADUATE</b>						
	Full-Time Headcount					
	Part-Time Headcount					
	Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Total FTE					
	% Change FTE Graduate	na	-	-	-	-
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>						
	Grand Total Headcount	0	0	0	0	0
	Grand Total FTE	0	0	0	0	0
	% Change Grand Total FTE	na	-	-	-	-

Please enter any explanatory notes in the box below

**Standard 5: Students**  
**(Financial Aid, Debt, Developmental Courses)**

Complete this form for each distinct student body identified by the institution (see Standard 5.1)

**?** Where does the institution describe the students it seeks to serve?

<b>?</b> Three-year Cohort Default Rate (from College Scorecard)	(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )

3 Years Prior	2 Years Prior	Most Recently Completed Year	Current Year	Goal (specify year)
(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )	(FY 2 )

<b>?</b> <b>Student Financial Aid</b>				
Total Federal Aid				
Grants				
Loans				
Work Study				
Total State Aid				
Total Institutional Aid				
Grants				
Loans				
Total Private Aid				
Grants				
Loans				

**Student Debt**

Percent of students graduating with debt (include all students who graduated in this calculation)

Undergraduates				
Graduates				
First professional students				

For students with debt:

Average amount of debt for students leaving the institution with a degree

Undergraduates				
Graduates				
First professional students				

Average amount of debt for students leaving the institution without a degree

Undergraduates				
Graduate Students				
First professional students				

**Percent of First-year students in Developmental Courses (courses for which no credit toward a degree is granted)**

English as a Second/Other Language				
English (reading, writing, communication skills)				
Math				
Other				

Please enter any explanatory notes in the box below

## Standard 5: Students (Student Diversity)

Complete this form for each distinct student body identified by the institution (see Standard 5.1)

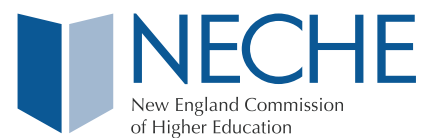
For each type of diversity important to your institution (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, first generation status, Pell eligibility), provide information on student admissions and enrollment below. Use current year data.

Undergraduate Admissions information	Completed Applications	Applicants Accepted	Applicants Enrolled		
? Category of Students (e.g., male/female); add more rows as needed					
Graduate Admissions information	Completed Applications	Applicants Accepted	Applicants Enrolled		
? Category of Students (e.g., male/female); add more rows as needed					
Undergraduate Enrollment information	Full-time Students	Part-time Students	Total Headcount	FTE	Headcount Goal (specify year)
? Category of Students (e.g., male/female); add more rows as needed			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
Graduate Enrollment information	Full-time Students	Part-time Students	Total Headcount	FTE	Headcount Goal (specify year)
? Category of Students (e.g., male/female); add more rows as needed			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		
			0		

Please enter any explanatory notes in the box below

# Standards for Accreditation

New England Commission of Higher Education



# **Standards for Accreditation**

**New England Commission of Higher Education**

**Standards Adopted 2020  
Effective January 1, 2021**



Copies of the Commission's Standards are available on-line at  
<https://neche.org>  
Print copies may be ordered from the  
New England Commission of Higher Education,  
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803  
Single copies are free; the charge for multiple copies is  
\$10.00 per copy.

# Standards for Accreditation

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## Standards for Accreditation

### Preamble

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is one of seven regional higher education accrediting bodies in the United States. NECHE is a voluntary, non-profit, self-governing organization having as its primary purpose the accreditation of educational institutions. Through its evaluation activities the Commission provides public assurance about the educational quality of degree-granting institutions that seek or wish to maintain accreditation.

Institutions of higher learning achieve accreditation from NECHE by demonstrating they meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* and comply with its policies. The *Standards for Accreditation* establish criteria for institutional quality; in addition, the Commission adopts policies that elucidate the Standards, relate to their application, and otherwise ensure that the Commission is current with respect to federal requirements and changing circumstances in higher education and public expectation. Moreover, the Commission expects affiliated institutions to work toward improving their quality, increasing their effectiveness, and continually striving toward excellence. Its evaluative processes are designed to encourage such improvement.

Each of the Standards articulates a dimension of institutional quality. In applying the Standards, the Commission assesses and makes a determination about the effectiveness of the institution as a whole. The institution that meets the Standards:

- has clearly defined purposes appropriate to an institution of higher learning;
- has assembled and organized those resources necessary to achieve its purposes;
- is achieving its purposes;
- has the ability to continue to achieve its purposes.

The Commission recognizes that some aspects of an institution are always stronger than others. Meeting the Standards does not guarantee the quality of individual programs, courses, or graduates, but serious weaknesses in a particular area may threaten the institution's accreditation.

The Commission approaches institutional differences in ways designed to protect both educational quality and individual philosophy and practice. The Standards are aspirational expectations that must be met at least minimally. They allow the Commission to appraise a wide variety of collegiate institutions, differing in purpose, size, organization, scope of program, clientele served, support, and control. By design, the Standards as explicated welcome perceptive and imaginative innovation aimed at increasing the effectiveness of higher education.

The institution whose policies, practices, or resources differ significantly from those described in the *Standards for Accreditation* must demonstrate that these are appropriate to higher education, consistent with the institution's mission and purposes, and effective in meeting the intent of the Commission's Standards. The existence of collective bargaining agreements, in and of themselves, does not abrogate institutional, faculty, or staff obligations to comply with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Self-regulation is an essential element in the success of accreditation. Thus, the *Standards for Accreditation* were developed through a lengthy participatory process involving the membership in articulating the

dimensions of quality required of institutions of higher education deserving of the public trust. Indeed the public as well was invited to participate in this process in recognition of the importance of higher education to the individual and collective well-being of our citizenry and for our economy. Thus, the Standards represent the accrued wisdom of over 200 colleges and universities and interested others about the essential elements of institutional quality, and they offer a perspective that stresses the public purposes of higher education. The Commission continually evaluates the effectiveness of its Standards and its processes for applying them and makes such changes as conditions warrant.

Self-regulation obliges institutions to adhere to the Standards as a condition of their accredited status; accredited colleges and universities demonstrate their integrity through their continued voluntary compliance to these criteria. Adherence to the Standards is periodically reviewed through peer evaluations that are preceded by self-studies directed toward demonstrating that the institution meets the Standards and that it has effective means to ensure institutional improvement. This system of accreditation is based on institutions agreeing to participate in and to accept and profit by an honest and forthright assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses.

Each of the dimensions of institutional quality has a Statement of the Standard set forth in bold type. The considerations in determining the fulfillment of the Standard are articulated in numbered paragraphs below the Statement of the Standard; these considerations provide a basis for institutions to undertake self-study as well as a basis for institutional evaluation by visiting teams and the Commission. Because the Standards represent dimensions of institutional quality, they are necessarily interrelated. Thus, considerations found in one Standard may also have application for another; for example, while there is a Standard on Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure, considerations related to integrity may also be found in several of the other Standards.

January 1, 2021

## Standard One

### Mission and Purposes

**The institution's mission and purposes are appropriate to higher education, consistent with its charter or other operating authority, and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the New England Commission of Higher Education. The institution's mission gives direction to its activities and provides a basis for the assessment and enhancement of the institution's effectiveness.**

- 1.1 The mission of the institution defines its distinctive character, addresses the needs of society, identifies the students the institution seeks to serve, and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. The institution's mission provides the basis upon which the institution identifies its priorities, plans its future, and evaluates its endeavors; it provides a basis for the evaluation of the institution against the Commission's Standards.
- 1.2 The institution's mission statement is formally adopted by the governing board and appears in appropriate printed and digital institutional publications.
- 1.3 The institution's purposes are concrete and realistic and further define its educational and other dimensions, including scholarship, research, and public service. Consistent with its mission, the institution endeavors to enhance the communities it serves.
- 1.4 The mission and purposes of the institution are accepted and widely understood by its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and sponsoring entity (if any). They provide direction to the curricula and other activities and form the basis on which expectations for student learning are developed. Specific objectives, reflective of the institution's overall mission and purposes, are developed by the institution's individual units.
- 1.5 The institution periodically evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, ensuring they are current and provide overall direction in planning, evaluation, and resource allocation.

## Standard Two Planning and Evaluation

**The institution undertakes planning and evaluation to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively. The institution demonstrates its success in strategic, academic, financial, and other resource planning and the evaluation of its educational effectiveness.**

- 2.1 Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts.
- 2.2 Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. (See also 8.6, 8.7)

### Planning

- 2.3 The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans.
- 2.4 The institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities.
- 2.5 The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning.

### Evaluation

- 2.6 The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, the quality of its academic programs, and the effectiveness of its operational and administrative activities, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide valid information to support institutional improvement. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- 2.7 The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement.
- 2.8 The institution has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation.

## Standard Three

### Organization and Governance

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organizational design and governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and where appropriate, research and creative activity. It demonstrates administrative capacity by assuring provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component. The institution has sufficient autonomy and control of its programs and operations consistent with its mission to be held directly accountable for meeting the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*.

- 3.1 The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and sponsoring entity (if any) are clearly described in the institution's by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, faculty, and sponsoring entity understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles.
- 3.2 The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them.

#### Governing Board

- 3.3 The governing board is the legally constituted body ultimately responsible for the institution's quality and integrity. Where the institution's ownership or affiliation structure or other circumstances or requirements may involve more than one legally constituted body with authority, the institution demonstrates that the governing body with direct responsibility for the institution's quality and integrity has sufficient autonomy and control to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's Standards and to ensure that it can act in the institution's best interest and that the legally constituted bodies with authority have an aligned understanding of their respective roles.
- 3.4 The board assures representation of the public interest in its composition and reflects the areas of competence needed to fulfill its responsibilities. Two-thirds or more of the board members, including the chair, are free of any personal or immediate familial financial interest in the institution, including as employee, stockholder or shareholder, corporate director, or contractor.
- 3.5 Members of the governing board understand, accept, and fulfill their responsibilities as fiduciaries to act honestly and in good faith in the best interest of the institution toward the achievement of its educational purposes in a manner free from conflicts of interest.
- 3.6 In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered relative to the mission of the institution.
- 3.7 The board has a clear understanding of the institution's distinctive mission and exercises the authority to ensure the realization of institutional mission and purposes. The board approves



and reviews institutional policies; monitors the institution's fiscal condition; and approves major new initiatives, assuring that they are compatible with institutional mission and capacity. These policies are developed in consultation with appropriate constituencies. The board assures that the institution periodically reviews its success in fulfilling its mission and serving its students. The Board is effective in helping the institution make strategic decisions and confront unforeseen circumstances. It regularly reviews the institution's systems of enterprise risk management, external audits, regulatory compliance, internal controls, and contingency management. The board assures appropriate attention is given to succession planning for institutional leadership and, where applicable, the composition of the board itself.

- 3.8 The board systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness through orientation, professional development, effective self-assessment, and regular evaluation including an external perspective. The board addresses its goals for diversity within its membership. Its role and functions are effectively carried out through appropriate committees and meetings.
- 3.9 Utilizing the institutional governance structure, the board establishes and maintains appropriate and productive channels of communication among its members and with the institutional community.
- 3.10 The board appoints and periodically reviews the performance of the chief executive officer whose full-time or major responsibility is to the institution.
- 3.11 The board delegates to the chief executive officer and, as appropriate, to others the requisite authority and autonomy to manage the institution compatible with the board's intentions and the institution's mission. In exercising its fiduciary responsibility, the governing board assures that senior officers identify, assess, and manage risks and ensure regulatory compliance.

### **Internal Governance**

- 3.12 The chief executive officer, through an appropriate administrative structure, effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer manages and allocates resources in keeping with institutional purposes and objectives and assesses the effectiveness of the institution. The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs faculty and staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope.
- 3.13 In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution.
- 3.14 The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution. (See also 4.5)

- 3.15 The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. (See also 6.2)
- 3.16 The system of governance makes provisions for consideration of student views and judgments in those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest.
- 3.17 Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations.
- 3.18 The institution using contractual arrangements, consortial or other written agreements involving credits and degrees, the delivery of coursework, the assessment of student achievement, or the recruitment or support of students regularly reviews the effectiveness of such arrangements and negotiates appropriate changes. Consistent with Commission policy, the institution maintains sufficient control over the arrangements to ensure quality in the academic program and services for students and prospective students, including the ability to modify the agreements as needed. Written agreements provide for the termination or phasing out of such arrangements as circumstances warrant, and the institution develops appropriate exit strategies as needed. (See also 4.36)
- 3.19 The effectiveness of the institution's organizational structure and system of governance is improved through regular and systematic review.

## Standard Four The Academic Program

**The institution's academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. The institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded and develops the systematic means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program.**

- 4.1 The institution offers collegiate-level programs consisting of a curriculum of studies that leads to a degree in a recognized field of study and requires at least one year to complete. The institution for which the associate's degree is the highest awarded offers at least one program in liberal studies or another area of study widely available at the baccalaureate level of regionally accredited colleges and universities.
- 4.2 The institution publishes the learning goals and requirements for each program. Such goals include the knowledge, intellectual and academic skills, competencies, and methods of inquiry to be acquired. In addition, if relevant to the program, goals include creative abilities and values to be developed and specific career-preparation practices to be mastered.
- 4.3 Programs leading to degrees or other awards have a coherent design and are characterized by appropriate breadth, depth, continuity, sequential progression, and synthesis of learning. Coherence is demonstrated through learning goals, structure, and content; policies and procedures for admission, retention, and completion; instructional methods and procedures; and the nature, quality, and extent of student learning and achievement.
- 4.4 The institution offering multiple academic programs ensures that all programs meet or exceed the basic quality standards of the institution and that there is a reasonable consistency in quality among them. The institution provides sufficient resources to sustain and improve its academic programs.

### Assuring Academic Quality

- 4.5 Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered. (See also 3.14)
- 4.6 The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters.
- 4.7 The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives.

- 4.8 The institution undertaking substantive changes (e.g., the initiation of degrees at a higher or lower level, off-campus programs, programs that substantially broaden the scope of the academic offerings, distance learning programs, correspondence education programs, competency- and mastery-based programs, contractual relationships involving courses and programs, academic programs overseas) demonstrates its capacity to undertake and sustain such initiatives and to assure that the new academic programming meets the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's Standards and policies. In keeping with Commission policy, the institution initiating substantive changes seeks Commission approval prior to implementation. The institution recognizes and takes account of the increased demands on resources made by programs offered at a higher degree level.
- 4.9 When programs are eliminated or program requirements are changed, the institution makes appropriate arrangements for enrolled students so that they may complete their education with a minimum of disruption. In the case of program elimination, the institution prepares a teach-out plan consistent with Commission policy. (See also Policy on Teach-out Plans and Teach-out Agreements)
- 4.10 If the institution depends on resources outside its direct control (for example, classrooms, information resources, information technology, testing sites), a written agreement ensures the reasonable continued availability of those resources. Clear descriptions of the circumstances and procedures for the use of such resources are readily available to students who require them. (See also 7.21)
- 4.11 Students completing an undergraduate or graduate program demonstrate collegiate-level skills in the English language.
- 4.12 Expectations for student achievement, independent learning, information literacy, skills in inquiry, and critical judgment are appropriate to the subject matter and degree level and in keeping with generally accepted practice.

### **Undergraduate Degree Programs**

- 4.13 Undergraduate degree programs are designed to give students a substantial and coherent introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge, their theories and methods of inquiry, plus in-depth mastery of at least one disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements in official publications and in student records.
- 4.14 Each undergraduate program includes a general education requirement and a major or concentration requirement. At the baccalaureate level, curricula include substantial requirements at the advanced undergraduate level, with appropriate prerequisites. The institution also affords undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue knowledge and understanding through unrestricted electives.
- 4.15 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.

## **General Education**

- 4.16 The general education program is coherent and substantive. It reflects the institution's mission and values and embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn.
- 4.17 The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another.
- 4.18 The institution ensures that all undergraduate students complete at least the equivalent of 40 semester credits in a bachelor's degree program, or the equivalent of 20 semester credits in an associate's degree program in general education.

## **The Major or Concentration**

- 4.19 The major or area of concentration affords the student the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in a specific disciplinary or clearly articulated interdisciplinary area above the introductory level through properly sequenced course work or competencies. Requirements for the major or area of concentration are based upon clear and articulated learning objectives, including a mastery of the knowledge, information resources, methods, and theories pertinent to a particular area of inquiry. Through the major or concentration, the student develops an understanding of the complex structure of knowledge germane to an area of inquiry and its interrelatedness to other areas of inquiry. For programs designed to provide professional training, an effective relationship exists between curricular content or competencies and effective practice in the field of specialization. Graduates demonstrate an in-depth understanding of an area of knowledge or practice, its principal information resources, and its interrelatedness with other areas.

## **Graduate Degree Programs**

- 4.20 Graduate degree programs are designed to give students a mastery of a complex field of study or professional area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements, in relevant official publications, and in the learning outcomes of graduates. Learning objectives reflect the high level of complexity, specialization, and generalization inherent in advanced academic study.
- 4.21 Graduate programs are not offered unless resources and expectations exceed those required for an undergraduate program in a similar field.
- 4.22 Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, experience, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement. The scholarly expectations of faculty exceed those expected for faculty working at the undergraduate level. Research-oriented graduate programs have a preponderance of active research scholars on their faculties. Professionally-oriented programs include faculty who are experienced professionals making scholarly contributions to the development of the field.
- 4.23 Students admitted to graduate degree programs are demonstrably qualified for advanced academic study.

- 4.24 The institution's graduate programs have cohesive curricula and require scholarly and professional activities designed to advance the student substantially beyond the educational accomplishments of a baccalaureate degree program. The demands made by the institution's graduate programs on students' intellectual and creative capacities are also significantly greater than those expected at the undergraduate level; graduate programs build upon and challenge students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence acquired at the undergraduate level. The institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs assesses the relationship and interdependence of the two levels and utilizes the results for improvement. Doctoral-level programs build upon and challenge students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence acquired at the master's level.
- 4.25 Degree requirements of the institution's graduate programs take into account specific program purposes. Research-oriented doctoral programs, including the Ph.D., and disciplinary or research-oriented master's degree programs, are designed to prepare students to generate new knowledge; they emphasize the acquisition, organization, utilization, generation, and dissemination of knowledge. Doctoral degree programs afford the student substantial mastery of the subject matter, theory, literature, and methodology of a significant field of study. They include a sequential development of research skills leading to the attainment of an independent research capacity. Students undertake original research that contributes to new knowledge in the chosen field of study. Disciplinary or research-oriented master's programs have many of the same objectives but require less sophisticated levels of mastery in the chosen field of study than does the research doctorate. While they need not require students to engage in original research, they do provide an understanding of research appropriate to the discipline and the manner in which it is conducted.
- 4.26 Professional, performance, or practice-oriented programs at the doctoral or master's degree levels are designed to prepare students for professional careers involving the application or transmission of existing knowledge or the development of new applications of knowledge within their field. Such programs afford the student a broad conceptual mastery of the field of professional practice through an understanding of its subject matter, literature, theory, and methods. They seek to develop the capacity to identify, evaluate, interpret, organize, and communicate knowledge, and to develop those analytical and professional skills needed to practice in and advance the profession. Instruction in relevant research methodology is provided, directed toward the appropriate application of its results as a regular part of professional practice. Programs include the sequential development of professional skills that will result in competent practitioners. Where there is a hierarchy of degrees within an area of professional study, programs differ by level as reflected in the expected sophistication, knowledge, and capacity for leadership within the profession by graduates.
- 4.27 Programs encompassing both research activities and professional practice define their relative emphases in program objectives that are reflected in curricular, scholarly, and program requirements.
- 4.28 Students who successfully complete a graduate program demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program's objectives.

### **Transfer Credit**

- 4.29 In accepting undergraduate transfer credit from other institutions, the institution applies policies and procedures that ensure the credit accepted reflects appropriate levels of academic quality and is applicable to the student's program. The institution's policies for considering the transfer of credit are publicly available to students and prospective students on its website and in other



communications. The information includes the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education along with a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements. (See also 9.18)

- 4.30 The institution protects academic quality and integrity in the acceptance of transfer credit and seeks to establish articulation agreements with institutions from which and to which there is a significant pattern of student transfer. Such agreements are made available to those students affected by them.
- 4.31 In accepting transfer credit, the institution exercises the responsibility to ensure that students have met its stated learning outcomes of programs at all degree levels. The institution does not erect barriers to the acceptance of transfer credit that are unnecessary to protect its academic quality and integrity. The acceptance of transfer credit does not substantially diminish the proportion of intermediate and advanced coursework in a student's academic program.
- 4.32 At the graduate level, the institution accepts credit in transfer on a strictly limited basis to preserve the integrity of the degree awarded.

### **Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit**

- 4.33 The institution's degrees and other forms of academic recognition are appropriately named, following practices common to American institutions of higher education in terms of length, content, and level of the programs. The institution ensures that minimum degree requirements are 60 semester credits at the associate's level; 120 semester credits at the baccalaureate level; and 30 semester credits at the master's level. The institution demonstrates restraint in requiring credits above the minimum for undergraduate degrees.
- 4.34 The institution offering competency-based programs, including through direct assessment, produces a transcript for each student showing the credit equivalencies of the competencies attained, in order to demonstrate the comparability of the program and provide students and graduates with transcripts facilitating evaluation of their achievements by other academic institutions and outside entities. Commission Standards and policies regarding the award of credit guide institutions offering competency-based programs to ensure that such programs are at least equivalent in breadth, depth, and rigor. The institution certifies the attainment of competencies for students who have achieved the stated objectives only at levels at or approaching excellence.
- 4.35 The institution offers required and elective courses as described in publicly available print and digital formats with sufficient availability to provide students with the opportunity to graduate within the published program length.
- 4.36 The institution demonstrates its clear and ongoing authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses for which it awards institutional credit or credentials. These responsibilities include course content, the specification of required competencies, and the delivery of the instructional program; selection, approval, professional development, and evaluation of faculty; admission, registration, and retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; and evaluation of student progress, including the awarding and recording of credit. The institution retains, even with contractual, dual enrollment, or other arrangements, responsibility for the design, content, and delivery of courses for which academic credit or degrees are awarded. The institution awarding a joint, dual, or concurrent degree demonstrates that the program is consistent with Commission policy and that the student learning outcomes meet the institution's own standards and those of the Commission. (See also 3.18)

- 4.37 The evaluation of student learning or achievement and the award of credit or certification of competencies are based upon clearly stated criteria that reflect learning objectives and are consistently and effectively applied. They are appropriate to the degree level at which they are applied.
- 4.38 Credit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning. The award of credit is based on policies developed and overseen by the faculty and academic administration. There is demonstrable academic content for all experiences for which credit is awarded, including study abroad, internships, independent study, experiential learning, and service learning. No credit toward graduation is awarded for pre-collegiate-level or remedial work designed to prepare the student for collegiate study.
- 4.39 Credit for prior experiential or non-collegiate sponsored learning is awarded only with appropriate oversight by faculty and academic administration and is limited to 25% for credentials of 30 credits or fewer. When credit is awarded on the basis of prior experiential or non-collegiate sponsored learning alone, student learning and achievement are demonstrated to be at least comparable in breadth, depth, and quality to the results of institutionally provided learning experiences. The policies and procedures for the award of credit for prior or experiential learning are clearly stated and available to affected students.
- 4.40 Students complete at least one-fourth of their undergraduate credits, including substantial advanced work in the major or concentration, at the institution awarding the degree.
- 4.41 The institution that advances students through their academic programs through transfer or articulation agreements, dual or concurrent enrollment, prior learning assessment, credit recommendation services, or other extra-institutional arrangements evaluates the effectiveness of such arrangements to ensure student achievement in institutionally offered coursework validates the suitability of the credit awards.
- 4.42 The institution publishes requirements for continuation in, termination from, or re-admission to its academic programs that are compatible with its educational purposes. Decisions about the continuing academic standing of enrolled students are based on clearly stated policies and applied by faculty and academic administrators.
- 4.43 Graduation requirements are clearly stated in appropriate publications and are consistently applied in the degree certification process. The degrees awarded accurately reflect student attainments.
- 4.44 Faculty, with administrative support, ensure the academic integrity of the award of grades and certification of competencies, where applicable, and credits for individual courses. The institution works to prevent cheating and plagiarism as well as to deal forthrightly with any instances in which they occur. It works systematically to ensure an environment supportive of academic integrity.
- 4.45 The institution offering programs and courses for abbreviated or concentrated time periods or via distance or correspondence learning demonstrates that students completing these programs or courses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies equivalent to those achieved in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods and modalities. Programs and courses are designed to ensure an opportunity for reflection and for analysis of the subject matter.



- 4.46 Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through dual enrollment, through distance or correspondence education, or through continuing education, evening, or weekend divisions are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. Faculty and students receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality. (See also 5.9)
- 4.47 All students, including those enrolled in off-campus courses, distance learning courses, correspondence education courses, and/or competency-based programs have sufficient opportunities to interact with faculty regarding course content and related academic matters.
- 4.48 The institution offering distance education or correspondence education has procedures through which it establishes that the student who registers for such a course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. In carrying out these procedures, the institution protects student privacy.
- 4.49 The institution offering certificates, badges, and other forms of academic recognition based on competencies or courses offered for credit ensures the coherence and level of academic quality are consistent with its degree programs.

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## Standard Five Students

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve. The institution addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its students and provides a safe environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. It endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their educational program as specified in institutional publications. The institution's interactions with students and prospective students are characterized by integrity and equity.

- 5.1 The institution that enrolls multiple student bodies, by degree level, modality, location, or other variables, ensures that it meets the expectations set forth in this Standard for each of its student bodies.

### Admissions

- 5.2 Consistent with its mission, the institution describes the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve. This description informs recruitment and admissions activities and the academic and other support programs and services available to students. (See also 9.18)
- 5.3 The institution has an orderly and ethical program of recruitment and admission that complies with the requirements of legislation concerning equality of educational opportunity. Its admission and retention policies and procedures are clear, consistent with its mission and purposes, and available to all students and prospective students in appropriate printed and digital institutional publications. The institution ensures the integrity of its admissions standards and processes through regular evaluation. (See also 9.18)
- 5.4 Standards for admission ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with institutional objectives. Individuals admitted demonstrate through their intellectual and personal qualifications a reasonable potential for success in the programs to which they are admitted. If the institution recruits and admits individuals with identified needs that must be addressed to assure their likely academic success, it applies appropriate mechanisms to address those needs so as to provide reasonable opportunities for that success. Such mechanisms receive sufficient support and are adequate to the needs of those admitted. The institution endeavors to integrate specifically recruited populations into the larger student body and to assure that they have comparable academic experiences.
- 5.5 The institution utilizes appropriate methods of evaluation to assess student readiness for collegiate study and provides services sufficient to serve the needs of students admitted.
- 5.6 The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services. (See also 8.6)

### Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

- 5.7 The institution ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success.

- 5.8 The institution systematically identifies the characteristics and needs of its student population and then makes provision for responding to them. The institution's student services are guided by a philosophy that reflects the institution's mission and special character, is circulated widely and reviewed periodically, and provides the basis on which services to students can be evaluated. (See also 8.4)
- 5.9 The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees. (See also 4.46)
- 5.10 The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance.
- 5.11 A clear description of the nature, extent, and availability of student services is readily available to students and prospective students. Newly enrolled students are provided with an orientation that includes information on student services as well as a focus on academic opportunities, expectations, and support services.
- 5.12 In providing services, in accordance with its mission and purposes, the institution adheres to both the spirit and intent of equal opportunity and its own goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion. (See also 9.5)
- 5.13 Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program. Awards are based on the equitable application of clear and publicized criteria.
- 5.14 Through a systematic program, the institution regularly provides students before borrowing with clear and timely information about cost, debt, and repayment. (See also 9.23)
- 5.15 As appropriate, the institution provides co-curricular activities and supports opportunities for student leadership and participation in campus organizations and governance.
- 5.16 If the institution offers recreational and athletic programs, they are subordinate to the educational program and conducted in a manner that adheres to institutional mission, sound educational policy, and standards of integrity. The institution is responsible for the control of these programs, including their financial aspects. The institution maintains the same academic expectations for and affords the same academic opportunities to student athletes as other students.
- 5.17 The institution ensures that individuals responsible for student services are qualified by formal training and work experience and organizationally placed to represent and address the needs of students effectively. Personnel, facilities, technology, and funding are adequate to implement the institution's student services policies and procedures.
- 5.18 The institution has identified, published widely, and implemented an appropriate set of clearly stated ethical standards to guide student services. Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including student conduct and grievance procedures, are clearly stated, well publicized and readily available, and fairly and consistently administered.

- 5.19 Following regulatory guidance, the institution has publicly available policies regarding the kinds of information that will be included in the permanent academic record of students as well as policies regarding the retention, safety and security, and disposal of records. Its information-release policies respect the rights of individual privacy, the confidentiality of records, and the best interests of students and the institution.
- 5.20 Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve an equitable educational experience for all of its students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these efforts and services and improve their achievement. (See also 8.4)

## Standard Six

### Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

The institution supports teaching and learning through a well-qualified faculty and academic staff, who, in structures and processes appropriate to the institution, collectively ensure the quality of instruction and support for student learning. Scholarship, research, and creative activities receive support appropriate to the institution's mission. The institution's faculty has primary responsibility for advancing the institution's academic purposes through teaching, learning, and scholarship.

#### Faculty and Academic Staff

- 6.1 Faculty categories (e.g., full-time, part-time, clinical, research, professor-of-practice, adjunct) are clearly defined by the institution as is the role of each category in fulfilling the institution's mission. All faculty are appropriately integrated into the department/division and institution and have appropriate opportunities for professional development. Where teaching assistants are employed, the institution carefully selects, trains, supervises, and evaluates them. The composition of the faculty reflects the institution's mission, programs, and student body and is periodically reviewed. The institution's use of all categories of faculty and teaching assistants to conduct instruction is regularly assessed, properly overseen, and consistent with its mission.
- 6.2 There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes. Responsibilities include instruction, accessibility to students, and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include, e.g., student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance. (See also 3.15)
- 6.3 The preparation and qualifications of all faculty and academic staff are appropriate to the nature of their assignments. Qualifications are measured by advanced degrees held, evidence of scholarship, advanced study, creative activities, and teaching abilities, as well as relevant professional experience, training, and credentials.
- 6.4 The institution employs an open and orderly process for recruiting and appointing its faculty. Faculty participate in the search process for continuing members of the instructional staff.
- 6.5 The institution ensures equal employment opportunity consistent with legal requirements and any other dimensions of its choosing. Compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty and academic staff and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals (See also 9.5). Hiring reflects the effectiveness of this process and results in a variety of academic and professional backgrounds, training, and experience. Each prospective hire is provided with a written agreement that states explicitly the nature and term of the initial appointment and, when applicable, institutional considerations that might preclude or limit future appointments.
- 6.6 Salaries and benefits are set at levels that ensure the institution's continued ability to attract and retain appropriately qualified faculty and academic staff whose profiles are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. Faculty and academic staff are provided with substantial opportunities for continued professional development throughout their careers.

- 6.7 Faculty assignments are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities, and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution. Faculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change.
- 6.8 In a handbook or in other written documents that are current and readily available, the institution defines the responsibilities of faculty and other members of the instructional team; the criteria for their recruitment, appointment, retention, evaluation, promotion, and, if applicable, tenure; and policies for resolving grievances.
- 6.9 The institution has a statement of expectations and processes to ensure that faculty act responsibly and ethically, observe the established conditions of their employment, and otherwise function in a manner consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution.
- 6.10 Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process.
- 6.11 The institution defines the scholarly expectations for faculty consistent with its mission and purposes and the level of degrees offered. Through their scholarly pursuits, all faculty are current in the theory, knowledge, skills, and pedagogy of their discipline or profession. Scholarship and instruction are mutually supportive.
- 6.12 The institution protects and fosters academic freedom for all faculty regardless of rank or term of appointment.
- 6.13 When instruction, advising, and support for students are carried out by a variety of faculty and academic and other professionals, the institution ensures that personnel in each category have the academic and professional qualifications appropriate to their roles. The governance system ensures that the experiences and data gathered by each group are coordinated, shared, and reviewed collectively for purposes of improving the academic program and services for students.
- 6.14 The institution periodically evaluates the sufficiency of and support for academic staff and their effectiveness in teaching and advising, scholarship, service, and as appropriate to institutional mission, research, and creative activity. The results of these evaluations are used to enhance fulfillment of the institution's mission.

### **Teaching and Learning**

- 6.15 The content and methods of instruction meet generally accepted academic and professional standards and expectations, and considerations of educational improvement are informed by a shared understanding of what and how students are learning in their academic program.
- 6.16 Instructional techniques and delivery systems are compatible with and serve to further the mission and purposes of the institution as well as the learning goals of academic programs and objectives of individual courses. Methods of instruction are appropriate to the students' capabilities and learning needs.

- 6.17 The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is regularly and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task.
- 6.18 Students in each major are taught by a variety of faculty to ensure their exposure to different academic strengths and viewpoints. The institution offering multiple sections of the same course ensures an appropriate balance between consistency in learning outcomes and flexibility, allowing students to benefit from individual faculty members' expertise and teaching style.
- 6.19 The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery.
- 6.20 Consistent with its mission and purposes, the institution provides support for scholarship, research, and creative activities. Faculty and students undertake research to an extent reflective of the level and nature of the degrees awarded. Policies and procedures related to research are communicated throughout the institution.

## **Standard Seven Institutional Resources**

**The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission. Through periodic evaluation, the institution demonstrates that its resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future. The institution demonstrates, through verifiable internal and external evidence, its financial capacity to graduate its entering class. The institution administers its resources in an ethical manner and assures effective systems of enterprise risk management, regulatory compliance, internal controls, and contingency management.**

### **Human Resources**

- 7.1 The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission. It addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its personnel and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals. (See also 9.5)
- 7.2 Human resources policies are readily available, consistently applied, and periodically reviewed. Policies provide for the fair redress of grievances.
- 7.3 Terms of employment are clear, and compensation is adequate to ensure that the institution can attract and retain qualified administrators, faculty, and staff. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of all personnel. The institution ensures sufficient opportunities for professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff.

### **Financial Resources**

- 7.4 The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.
- 7.5 The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support.
- 7.6 The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students.
- 7.7 The governing board understands, reviews, and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting.
- 7.8 The board retains appropriate autonomy in all budget and finance matters; this includes institutions that depend on financial support from a sponsoring entity (state, church, or other private or public entity).
- 7.9 All or substantially all of the institution's resources are devoted to the support of its education, research, and service programs. The institution's financial records clearly relate to its educational activities.



- 7.10 The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution's financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution's mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve.
- 7.11 The institution ensures that it has sufficient professionally qualified finance staff, led by a chief financial officer whose primary responsibility to the institution is reflected in the organizational chart.
- 7.12 The institution ensures the integrity of its finances through prudent financial management and organization, a well-organized budget process, appropriate internal control mechanisms, risk assessment, and timely financial reporting to internal and external constituency groups, providing a basis for sound financial decision-making.
- 7.13 The institution establishes and implements its budget after appropriate consultation with relevant constituencies in accord with realistic overall planning that provides for the appropriate integration of academic, student service, fiscal, development, information, technology, and physical resource priorities to advance its educational objectives.
- 7.14 The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit.
- 7.15 Opportunities identified for new sources of revenue are reviewed by the administration and board to ensure the integrity of the institution and the quality of the academic program are maintained and enhanced. The institution planning a substantive change demonstrates the financial and administrative capacity to ensure that the new initiative meets the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's Standards.
- 7.16 Institutional and board leadership ensure the institution's ethical oversight of its financial resources and practices.
- 7.17 The institution prepares financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the U.S. The annual audit is prepared by an auditor external to the institution in accord with generally accepted auditing standards adopted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Board policies and institutional practices ensure the independence and objectivity of the auditor and the appropriate consideration of the audit by the governing board. For institutions whose financial statements are included and audited as part of a larger system or corporation, the system or corporation financial statements separately disclose financial information for each component institution to support a determination regarding the sufficiency and stability of the institution's financial resources. In all cases, the audit and management letter are appropriately reviewed by the institution's administration and governing board who take appropriate action on resulting recommendations or conclusions.
- 7.18 The institution directs its fundraising efforts toward the fulfillment of institutional purposes and conducts them in accordance with policies that stipulate the conditions and terms under which gifts are solicited and accepted. The institution's gift acceptance policies protect the institution's academic freedom and integrity. The institution accurately represents itself and its capacities and needs to prospective donors and accurately portrays the impact that their gifts can reasonably be expected to have. Gifts are promptly directed toward donors' intentions.

- 7.19 All fiscal policies, including those related to budgeting, investments, insurance, risk management, contracts and grants, internal transfers and borrowing, fundraising, and other institutional advancement and development activities, are clearly stated in writing and consistently implemented in compliance with ethical and sound financial practices.
- 7.20 The institution has in place appropriate internal and external mechanisms to evaluate its financial status including fiscal condition, working capital, capital projects, cash flow requirements, and financial management. The institution uses the results of these activities for improvement and to maintain institutional integrity.

### **Information, Physical, and Technological Resources**

- 7.21 The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources. (See also 4.10)
- 7.22 The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate.
- 7.23 Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthy environment with consideration for environmental and ecological concerns.
- 7.24 The institution's physical and electronic environments provide an atmosphere conducive to study and research.
- 7.25 The institution demonstrates the effectiveness of its policies and procedures in ensuring the reliability of its technology systems, the integrity and security of data, and the privacy of individuals. The institution establishes and applies clear policies and procedures and monitors and responds to illegal or inappropriate uses of its technology systems and resources. It has disaster and business continuity plans and recovery policies and procedures that are regularly evaluated and updated.
- 7.26 The institution effectively uses information technology to ensure its efficient ability to plan, administer, and evaluate its program and services.

## Standard Eight Educational Effectiveness

**The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by ensuring satisfactory levels of student achievement on mission-appropriate student outcomes. Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and improvement, resource allocation, and to inform the public about the institution. Student achievement is at a level appropriate for the degree awarded.**

- 8.1 The institution enrolling multiple student bodies, by degree level, location, modality, or other variables, develops and uses the data, evidence, and information below for each student body.
- 8.2 The institution provides clear public statements about what students are expected to gain from their education, academically and, as appropriate to the institution's mission, along other dimensions (e.g., civic engagement, religious formation, global awareness). Goals for students' education reflect the institution's mission, the level and range of degrees and certificates offered, and the general expectations of the larger academic community.
- 8.3 Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff.
- 8.4 The institution with stated goals for students' co-curricular learning systematically assesses their achievement. (See also 5.8, 5.20)
- 8.5 The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons.
- 8.6 The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website. (See also 2.2, 5.6, 9.22)
- 8.7 The institution uses additional quantitative measures of success, such as further education, civic participation, religious formation, and others, as appropriate to its mission, to understand the success of its recent graduates. Information from students and former students is regularly considered. (See also 2.2, 9.22)
- 8.8 The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the curriculum and learning opportunities and results for students.
- 8.9 The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning and student success are valid and useful to improve programs and services for students and to inform the public.

- 8.10 The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its institutional and program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students. (See also 9.22)

## Standard Nine

### Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

The institution subscribes to and advocates high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and in its dealings with students, prospective students, faculty, staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements. In presenting the institution to students, prospective students, and other members of the public, the institutional website provides information, including information about student success, that is complete, accurate, timely, readily accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution.

#### Integrity

- 9.1 The institution expects that members of its community, including the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students, will act responsibly, ethically, and with integrity; and it systematically supports the pursuit thereof. Institutional leadership fosters an atmosphere where issues of integrity can be openly considered, and members of the institutional community understand and assume their responsibilities in the pursuit of integrity. The pursuit of institutional integrity is strengthened through the application of findings from periodic and episodic assessments of the policies and conditions that support the achievement of these aims among members of the institutional community.
- 9.2 Truthfulness, clarity, and fairness characterize the institution's relations with all internal and external constituencies. Adequate provision is made to ensure academic honesty. Appropriate policies and procedures are in effect and periodically reviewed for matters including intellectual property rights, the avoidance of conflict of interest, privacy rights, and fairness in dealing with students, faculty, and staff. The institution's educational policies and procedures are equitably applied to all its students.
- 9.3 The institution is committed to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. It assures faculty and students the freedom to teach and study, to examine all pertinent data, to question assumptions, and to be guided by the evidence of scholarly research.
- 9.4 The institution observes the spirit as well as the letter of applicable legal requirements. It has a charter and/or other formal authority from the appropriate governmental agency authorizing it to grant all degrees it awards; it has the necessary operating authority for each jurisdiction in which it conducts activities; and it operates within this authority.
- 9.5 The institution adheres to non-discriminatory policies and practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement. It fosters an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds. (See also 5.12, 6.5, 7.1)
- 9.6 The institution manages its academic, research and service programs, administrative operations, responsibilities to students, and interactions with prospective students with honesty and integrity.
- 9.7 The institution is responsible for all activities that are sponsored by the institution or carry its name. These activities are compatible with the institution's mission and are administered within its organizational structure. The institution assumes responsibility for the appropriateness and integrity of such activities.

- 9.8 The institution has established and publicizes clear policies ensuring institutional integrity. Included among them are appropriate policies and procedures for the fair resolution of grievances brought by faculty, staff, or students.
- 9.9 In its relationships with the Commission, the institution demonstrates honesty and integrity, and it complies with the Commission's Standards, policies, Requirements of Affiliation, and requests. It notifies the Commission regarding adverse events and circumstances.
- 9.10 In addition to the considerations stated in this Standard, the institution adheres to those requirements related to institutional integrity embodied in all other Commission Standards.

### **Transparency**

- 9.11 The information published by the institution on its website is readily accessible and sufficient to allow students and prospective students to make informed decisions about their education. The institution's public website includes the information specified elsewhere in this Standard (9.17-9.25).
- 9.12 The institution provides sufficient information to the public about its processes for admissions, employment, grading, assessment, student discipline, and the consideration of complaints and appeals.
- 9.13 The institution is responsive to reasonable requests for information about itself and informs the public about how inquiries can be addressed. The institution provides notice as to the availability of its most recent audited financial statement or a fair summary thereof.
- 9.14 All forms of print and digital communications officially representing the institution are consistent with catalogue content and accurately portray the conditions and opportunities available at the institution. Institutions ensure the availability of archival editions of catalogues, regardless of their format.
- 9.15 The institution has readily available valid documentation for any statements and promises regarding such matters as program excellence, learning outcomes, success in placement, and achievements of graduates or faculty.
- 9.16 Through a systematic process of periodic review, the institution ensures that its print and digital publications are complete, accurate, available, readily accessible, and current. The results of the review are used for improvement.

### **Public Disclosure**

- 9.17 The institution's catalogue describes the institution consistent with its mission statement and sets forth the obligations and responsibilities of both students and the institution.
- 9.18 The institution publishes its mission, objectives, and expected educational outcomes; its status as a public or independent institution; if independent, its status as a not-for-profit or for-profit institution; any religious affiliation; requirements and procedures and policies related to admissions and the transfer of credit; a list of institutions with which it has articulation agreements; student fees, charges and refund policies; rules and regulations for student conduct; procedures for student appeals and complaints; other items related to attending or withdrawing from the institution; academic programs, courses currently offered, and other available educational opportunities; academic policies and procedures; and the requirements for degrees or other forms of academic recognition. (See also 4.29, 5.2, 5.3)

- 9.19 The institution publishes a list of its continuing faculty, indicating departmental or program affiliation, showing degrees held and the institutions granting them. The names and positions of administrative officers, and the names and principal affiliations of members of the governing board are also included.
- 9.20 The institution publishes a description of the size and characteristics of its student population(s), as well as a description of the campus setting for each of its physical locations (main campus, branch campuses, other instructional locations and overseas locations at which students can enroll for a degree). For each location and modality of instruction, the institution publishes a description of the programs, academic and other support services, co-curricular and non-academic opportunities, and library and other information resources available to students.
- 9.21 The institution clearly indicates those programs, courses, services, and personnel not available during a given academic year. It does not list as current any courses not taught for two consecutive years that will not be taught during the third consecutive year.
- 9.22 The institution publishes statements of its goals for students' education and makes available to the public timely, readily accessible, accurate, and consistent aggregate information about student achievement and institutional performance. Information on student success includes rates of retention and graduation and other measures of student success appropriate to institutional mission. If applicable, recent information on passage rates for licensure examinations is also published. (See also 8.6, 8.7, 8.10)
- 9.23 The institution publishes information about the total cost of education and net price, including the availability of financial aid and the typical length of study. The expected amount of student debt upon graduation and the institution's cohort default and loan repayment rates are published to help students and prospective students make informed decisions. (See also 5.14)
- 9.24 The institution ensures that when students, prospective students, or members of the public are interacting with an individual acting on behalf of the institution through a contractual or other written agreement, the relationship of that individual to the institution is clear.
- 9.25 The institution's statements about its current accredited status are accurately and explicitly worded. An institution placed on probation by the Commission discloses this status in all print and digital publications in which the institution's accreditation is mentioned.

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WAKEFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, USA

January 16, 2023

In a letter dated May 16, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education ([NECHE](http://neche.org)) notified Bay State College that it was being placed on probation for failing to meet two of its nine standards, Standard 3 (*Organization and Governance*) and Standard 7 (*Institutional Resources*). It also issued a public notation that the College was at risk of failing to meet two other standards, Standard 5 (*Students*) and Standard 6 (*Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*).

The College was again before the Commission in June, 2022 and also in August, 2022 when the Commission continued it on probation and on notation. A team of evaluators visited the College for three days in November, 2022, and the report of that team was before the Commission for consideration on January 12, 2023 for the College to show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

At its meeting on January 12, the Commission voted to withdraw Bay State College's accreditation as of August 31, 2023. This date was set to allow as many current students as possible to complete their degree without interruption. Bay State College has seven days from receiving written notice of the Commission's decision (notice sent and received on January 16) to inform the Commission if it will appeal the decision. Until the Commission receives notice that no appeal will be filed or if filed, the appeal is concluded, the decision of the Commission is not considered final.

The basis for the decision to withdraw accreditation is that the College failed to meet its burden of proof that it would come into compliance with Standard 7 by the end of the probationary period. The standard on *Institutional Resources* requires the institution to demonstrate it "has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission;" that its "resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future;" and to demonstrate "its financial capacity to graduate its entering class."

The specific concerns of the Commission included the following: the recent suspension of VA benefits for any new students, the placing of the College on Heightened Cash Monitoring-2 (HCM-2) status by the U.S. Department of Education which will require the College to front all Title IV funds for all its students which the College acknowledged will likely require it to seek additional funds from its owner, the fact that the operating deficit for the latest budget year (calendar year 2022) was \$500,000 more than projected, a low financial responsibility composite score (.07) from the U.S. Department of Education, the College's history of dramatic enrollment declines in the face of overly optimistic projections, and its failure, as of January 12, to have finalized even one teach-out agreement for any of its students or any of its programs.

Lawrence M. Schall

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