

Preface

What Distance Education Accreditation Means

Since 1926, the Distance Education and Training Council has been the leading global standard-setting agency for distance education institutions. The DETC has progressively raised its standards over the past eight decades. Its accrediting program employs procedures similar to those of other recognized educational accrediting agencies.

Each accredited institution must voluntarily meet the 12 standards for accreditation. An institution must:

- have a clearly defined and stated mission, goals, and objectives;
- have reasonably attainable and clearly stated educational objectives, and educationally sound and up-to-date courses/programs;
- provide satisfactory educational services;
- offer adequate student services;
- have demonstrated ample student success and satisfaction, and have an outcomes assessment plan;
- have qualified faculty and competent administrators and staff;
- have fair admission policies and adequate enrollment agreements;
- advertise its courses/programs truthfully;
- be financially able to deliver high quality educational services;
- have fair and equitable tuition and refund policies;
- have adequate facilities, equipment, and record protection; and
- conduct continuous research and self-improvement studies.

To become accredited, each institution must have made an intensive study of its own operations, opened its doors to a thorough inspection by an outside examining committee, supplied all information required by the Accrediting Commission, and submitted its instructional materials for a thorough review by competent subject matter specialists. The process is repeated every five years.

The Accrediting Commission

The Accrediting Commission establishes educational and ethical business standards. It examines and evaluates distance education institutions located around the world in terms of these standards. It accredits those that meet the standards. Its scope of accreditation requires a full institutional review and is based upon a method of education as opposed to grade levels, subject matter, or geographic location. In other words, DETC accreditation is an institutional and international source of accreditation for distance education institutions.

DETC is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as an authority on the quality of the education and training offered by the institutions it accredits, and has been so recognized since 1959. As the Secretary's authority is statutorily limited to postsecondary institutions in the United States, this federal recognition encompasses only DETC accreditation in this area. Although essentially the same processes and standards are used in accrediting elementary and secondary schools and foreign institutions, by federal law the Secretarial recognition of DETC accreditation does not include these institutions.

The U.S. Department of Education provides a database on its Web site of regional and national accrediting agencies. For more information on the U.S. Department of Education list of recognized accrediting agencies, please visit: <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>.

DETC is also recognized for its activity in the field of academic degree accreditation by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). For more information about CHEA, please visit www.chea.org.

Purpose of the Accreditation Handbook

The Accrediting Commission has prepared this Accreditation Handbook as a compilation of its policies, procedures, and standards. It is intended to assist institutions in understanding and preparing for evaluation by the Commission. Institutions should use it as they organize and conduct their self-evaluations, as they evaluate their readiness to meet the rigors inherent in voluntary accreditation, and as they work to maintain the standards of the Commission.

Finally, this Handbook offers guidance to newly established distance education institutions seeking to build or refine their policies and practices, whether or not they apply for DETC accreditation.

Please note that the Evaluator's Rating Forms, Guides and Miscellaneous are now found only on DETC's web site at www.detc.org (select Member Services and Evaluator's Rating Forms, Guides, Critical Documents and Miscellaneous – sign in using “guest” for your user name and password). The forms are no longer in the *DETC Accreditation Handbook*. If you need the documents sent to you, please contact Lissette Hubbard at Lissette@detc.org or call 202-234-5100 ext. 105.

Please note: You should always check the web site at www.detc.org (select the Publications tab) for the most up-to-date versions of these documents. The web site copy takes precedence over the information in this print version.