



Accreditation Handbook

January 2012
19th Edition

Policies, Procedures, and Standards of the
Accrediting Commission of the
Distance Education and Training Council

DETC Accreditation Handbook

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Downloadable pdf files of these documents may be found on DETC's website. The pdf files are DETC's official policies and procedures, and they take precedence over information in this printed edition. Please refer to the Update Sheet. Special templates for the SER and other forms may be downloaded from the website in Microsoft Word by selecting "Member Services" and then "Templates" or "Evaluator's Documents." The username and password is "guest."

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Accredited institutions must be in full compliance by January 1, 2012 with any revisions or additions to the 2012 DETC Accreditation Handbook.

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

The independent Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council is listed by the United States Department of Education as a "nationally recognized accrediting agency." The Accrediting Commission is also a recognized member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The U.S. Department of Education and CHEA recognition is for postsecondary program purposes only.

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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 in the United States. The DETC has progressively raised its standards over the past eight decades. Its accrediting program employs standards and procedures similar to those of other recognized educational accrediting agencies.

Each accredited institution must voluntarily meet all of the standards and policies for accreditation. There are 51 accreditation standards (A.1. Standards of Accreditation) and 56 Business Standards (A.2. Business Standards). These standards are organized into topics, which state that 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 curricula that are supported by quality instructional materials and appropriate technology;
- provide satisfactory educational services;
- offer adequate student support services;
- have demonstrated ample student success and satisfaction through 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, supplies, 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. Initial accreditation is granted for no more than three years, after which 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 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 source of accreditation for distance education institutions in the U.S.

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 U.S. federal law, the Secretarial recognition of DETC accreditation does not include these institutions.

The U.S. Department of Education provides a database on its website of regional, specialized, and national accrediting agencies. For more information on the U.S. Department of Education list of recognized accrediting agencies, please visit: 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 website at www.detc.org (select "Member Services" tab and "Evaluators Documents" and Evaluator's Rating Forms, Guides, Critical Documents and Miscellaneous – sign in using "guest" for your user name and password). 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 website at www.detc.org (select the Publications tab) for the most up-to-date versions of these documents. The website copy takes precedence over the information in this print version.

Introduction

Accreditation in education began over a century ago. The movement started as a public reaction to the extreme differences between educational institutions that initially appeared to be similar. Accrediting bodies were voluntarily organized by educators to develop and implement common policies and standards to measure educational quality. From its inception, accreditation has been a non-governmental, completely voluntary, peer group method of identifying educational institutions or programs which meet published standards of quality. A variety of regional and professional accrediting groups came into being in the early 1900s in response to the public's demand for reliable indicators of institutional quality.

Brief History of DETC and Its Accrediting Commission

The Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) was founded in 1926 under the name “National Home Study Council.” As a voluntary association of distance education institutions, DETC is dedicated to fostering quality assurance, protection of the rights of the students and institutional self-improvement through voluntary accreditation via peer evaluation. DETC accreditation aims to instill public confidence in DETC institutions' missions, goals, performances, and resources through rigorous application and peer-developed accreditation standards.

In 1952, the Council decided further improvements should be made in the procedures used to examine and approve distance study institutions for membership. A system of voluntary accreditation seemed to be the best solution. As the planning progressed, individuals in the then U.S. Office of Education, the National Commission on Accrediting, and other recognized accrediting agencies assisted in creating the Council.

The Council's independent Accrediting Commission was officially established in 1955. Four years later, the Commission was listed by the U.S. Commissioner (now Secretary) of Education as a “nationally recognized accrediting agency” under the terms of Public Law.

Like other nationally recognized accrediting agencies, the Accrediting Commission is reviewed periodically by the U.S. Department of Education to make certain that it meets the criteria for federal recognition as published in Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Since 1959, the U.S. Secretary of Education has continuously recognized the Accrediting Commission, and its recognition was last renewed in 2006. Its next review is scheduled for 2012. The procedures and standards of the Commission have been continuously refined and improved over the past six decades.

In 1973, the Accrediting Commission received the recognition of the National Commission on Accrediting, thus becoming the first agency accrediting private schools—at that time, most of them proprietary—to receive such recognition. In 1975, the Accrediting Commission became a charter member of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), a non-governmental body recognizing and coordinating the activities of accrediting agencies throughout the United States. In 1993, COPA was dissolved and the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) was formed. DETC was also a charter member of that organization.

In 1994, the National Home Study Council changed its name to the Distance Education and Training Council. CORPA was dissolved on in 1996 and its successor, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), was formed. DETC became a charter member of CHEA. The Commission's CHEA recognition was last renewed in January 2001. Its next review is in 2012.

Today, the Accrediting Commission is recognized by CHEA and the Secretary of Education as the national institutional accrediting body postsecondary institutions offering programs primarily by the distance education method up through the Professional Doctoral degree level.

DETC's federal scope of recognition **enables DETC degree-awarding institutions** to establish eligibility to participate in the various federal programs, i.e., Title IV federal student loans or Pell Grants, and the American Opportunity Tax Credit.

Recognition of the Commission from the U.S. Secretary of Education and from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation is for postsecondary purposes only, and these recognitions **do not** apply to elementary or secondary schools (this is due to changes in the federal law). However, the DETC Accrediting Commission has been examining, evaluating, and granting accreditation status to elementary and secondary schools since 1955.

Accreditation

Why Become Accredited?

What does accreditation mean to you, the CEO, administrator or faculty member of a distance education institution? Is it an opportunity to improve the educational quality of your institution? Is it a means of evaluating and comparing your courses/programs, facilities, and procedures with those of others? Or, is it a process whereby an accrediting body grants public recognition to an institution as having met certain standards?

Accreditation is **all** of these. However, the greatest value of accreditation is to be found in undergoing the process itself; a process of self-evaluation in which an institution voluntarily monitors and controls its own behavior to ensure that its "programs and policies embody standards of good practice."

Currently, accreditation may be said to:

- assure students that an institution delivers on its promises;
- foster excellence in education through the development of standards for assessing educational effectiveness;
- encourage improvement through continual self-evaluation and planning;
- demonstrate comparability between degree programs offered at regionally accredited institutions with DETC-accredited degree programs; and
- assure the educational community, students, state and federal authorities, the general public, and other interested agencies and/or organizations that an institution has clearly defined and appropriate objectives; maintains conditions under which their achievement can be reasonably expected; is accomplishing them; and can be expected to continue to do so.

The word "accreditation" has acquired many shades of meaning over the years. Distance education accreditation is certification by a recognized body that a distance education institution has voluntarily undergone a comprehensive study and peer examination which has demonstrated that the institution does in fact meet the established standards. The institution must perform the functions that it claims: that it has set educational goals for students who enroll; offers formal, organized learning experiences and services that enable students to meet these stated goals; and can, in fact, show that students and graduates have benefited from the learning experiences provided.

DETC accreditation is founded on these philosophic principles:

- Accreditation is purely voluntary. The applicant institution voluntarily elects to apply for accreditation and it voluntarily agrees to comply with all standards and policies of the Commission.
- Accreditation is a non-governmental peer review process in which the integrity and good faith of an institution and its officers are essential.
- The burden of proof in demonstrating compliance with standards always rests with the institution, not with the Accrediting Commission. The institution, whether it is an applicant seeking initial accreditation or an already accredited institution undergoing an on-site evaluation or responding to other Commission-directed inquiries of any kind, has the burden of proof in making a showing to the Accrediting Commission that it meets or exceeds the standards.
- The Accrediting Commission considers information about an applicant institution from any source in reaching its conclusion.
- Accreditation is by its nature a formal, but nonetheless, collegial process. It works best when there is a common agreement that the chief purpose for seeking accreditation is the identification of soundness, honesty, and quality in the practice of distance education. It was never intended to be an adversarial procedure whereby legal professionals employ courtroom procedures to attain accredited status.

What is DETC Accreditation?

Distance study accreditation is an institution-wide source of nationally recognized accreditation that covers all distance study activities of the institution. It is unique in American accreditation because it is based upon a method of delivering instruction rather than on geographical location, educational level, or subject matter discipline. It covers **all** programs, courses, and distance study endeavors of an institution, including degree, non-degree, vocational, and avocational programs. The Accrediting Commission of the DETC provides distance study institutions with a single source of nationally recognized accreditation, all the way from kindergarten through the doctorate degree levels.

What is Distance Education?

Distance education, also called online education, home study, correspondence study or Internet-based learning, is designed for learners who live at a distance from educational providers and/or institutions. It is the formal enrollment and study with an educational institution that provides organized, formal learning opportunities for students. Presented in a sequential and logical order, the instruction is offered wholly or primarily by distance study, through virtually any media. Historically, its predominant medium of instruction has been printed materials, however today it may incorporate or make use of videotapes, CD or DVD ROM's, audio recordings, audio-conferencing, telephone communications, e-mail, and Web-based delivery systems through the Internet. The student completes each lesson or segment and submits it for correction, grading, comment, and guidance by a qualified instructor.

To determine eligibility to participate in Title IV programs, the federal government defines distance education as education that uses one or more of the following technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously: Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio-conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the former technologies.

Institutions are not eligible to participate in federal student aid if its courses/programs are offered through correspondence study, which is defined as education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instruction. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced, and they are not considered the same as distance education courses for purposes of the Department of Education’s regulations under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

DETC limits eligibility to Title IV programs to degree-granting distance education institutions only. DETC’s scope of accreditation covers both correspondence and distance education. For the purposes of this Handbook, the term “distance education” also encompasses correspondence study, except for Title IV purposes.

What are the Benefits of Accreditation?

For more than a century, DETC institutions have been leaders in the field of distance education. Accreditation:

- provides a reliable indicator of institution quality for counselors, employers, educators, governmental officials, and the public;
- is an expression of confidence in the educational program, the policies, and the procedures of the institution by its peers—a lasting source of pride to the institution;
- is an external source of stimulation to improve services, programs, and staff through periodic self-studies and evaluations by an outside agency;
- is an assurance of high standards and educational quality through the institution’s adherence to established criteria, policies, and standards;
- brings the institution recognition through the extension of special status by several states under their legislation and regulations, as well as recognition given by federal, state, and local agencies in referring students to accredited institutions;
- allows an institution and its courses to be listed in DETC’s searchable database and in the *DETC Directory of Accredited Institutions* on DETC’s website;
- enables the institution to qualify to participate in the voluntary education tuition assistance program administered by the Defense Activity on Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) for most of the U.S. military services;
- by federal law, provides eligibility for certain federal programs. For example, only accredited distance education institutions are eligible to participate in the G.I. Bill and military tuition assistance program. DETC degree-awarding institutions are eligible to apply to the U.S. Department of Education to participate in the Title IV federal student aid programs;
- permits an institution to be listed in the directory the American Council on Education’s directory, *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education*;

- permits an institution to be listed on the institution databases of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education’s websites;
- authorizes an institution to obtain the coveted “.edu” e-mail and website addresses;
- allows the use of the DETC seal and reference to accreditation by the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council;
- allows students to qualify for tuition reimbursement under certain state, industry, corporate, or union-sponsored tuition assistance plans requiring enrollment with an accredited institution;
- brings eligibility for participation in the academic credit evaluation procedure conducted by the American Council on Education’s College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT);
- helps facilitate, but does not guarantee, acceptance of credits and degrees by other academic institutions; and
- provides a unique professional development opportunity for the institution’s staff members to serve on accrediting examining committees visiting other institutions.

The Accrediting Commission

Members of the Accrediting Commission

The DETC Accrediting Commission is a constituted accrediting body that operates within the incorporated association of the Distance Education and Training Council. The Commission has complete autonomy to make accrediting decisions. The Accrediting Commission has nine members, and its makeup includes persons possessing either academic or administrative expertise or both. Four of the Commissioners are from outside the field and are considered in every sense to be representatives of the public, and five Commissioners are from the distance education field. For more information on the qualifications and training of the Commissioners, see D.10. Selection and Training of Commissioners.

The DETC Accrediting Commission is comprised of nine (9) members: five (5) members from DETC-accredited institutions elected by the Council and four (4) members appointed by the Commission to represent the public. At least two members of the Commission must be “academics,” defined by DETC as a person who works full time at an educational institution who, possibly in addition to other duties, actively teaches, delivers educational content to learners, or engages in educational research related to the institution’s mission. At least two members of the Commission must be an “administrator” defined by DETC as a person currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in the administration of an institution.

Institution Commissioners: The five Institution Commissioners are selected from DETC accredited institutions and are individuals who are currently active academic or administrative personnel who do not have a representative currently serving on the Accrediting Commission. Institution Commissioners may serve for a maximum of two three-year terms.

The Commissioners are selected so that they are representative of the variety of institutions in the Distance Education and Training Council and the distance education field insofar as possible.

Public Commissioners: The four Public Commissioners are from outside the distance education field and are selected for their overall interest in education and their competence in business, industry, education, government, and related fields. Public Commissioners may serve for a maximum of three three-year terms.

Public Commissioners have been appointed to serve on the Commission because of the great interest they have demonstrated in the cause of high standards for institutions, their willingness to become involved and committed to the accrediting program for distance education, their demonstrated objectivity and sound judgment, and the outstanding competencies they bring to the Commission from their respective backgrounds.

A Public Commissioner may not be (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution that either is accredited by DETC or has applied for such accreditation; (2) a member of any organization that transacts business with or receives funding or payments from; and (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in (1) or (2) above.

Officers of the Commission: The officers of the Commission are a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and the Executive Secretary who is also the Executive Director. The Chair and Vice Chair are members of the Accrediting Commission elected to office by vote of the Commissioners. It is customary for a Public Commissioner to serve as the Commission Chair.

For the academic and professional qualifications, and employment and organizational affiliations of the Commissioners, see DETC’s website at www.detc.org and select “About Us.”

Current Members of the Accrediting Commission: The following individuals are the current members of the Accrediting Commission—

- Timothy Mott, *Chair*, Director, Off-Campus Programs at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College*
- Mary Adams, *Vice Chair*, President, American Sentinel University
- Josette P. Katz, Professor, Atlantic Cape Community College*
- Patrick O’Malley, Assurance Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (retired)*
- Robert G. Mayes, Jr., President, Columbia Southern University
- Jack Nill, Provost, Global University
- Carol S. Osborn, Deputy Director, DAN TES (retired)*
- Ann Rohr, President, Weston Distance Learning
- Judith A. Turner, Vice President and Director of Education, Art Instruction Schools

*Public Commissioners

The Staff

Equally valuable in this process is the Commission’s staff, which assists the Commission in carrying out its mission. The staff provides counsel to applicants seeking accreditation and accredited institutions, training for Commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, Appeals Panel members, and continuous communication with states, including the U.S. Department of Education, CHEA, and other relevant agencies. Accrediting Commission staff members serve as observers on Examining Committees; appoint Examining Committee members; arrange logistics for visits and Commission meetings; and serve as the central communications link between the public, applicants, other accrediting associations, and the Accrediting Commission.

The Executive Director is the day-to-day administrator of the Commission and the staff, and he manages and supervises the accreditation process. The Executive Director is responsible for liaison between and among the Commissioners, the Examining Committees, and the institutions participating in the accrediting process.

Current Staff Members: The current staff members and the year each started service are—

- Michael P. Lambert, Executive Director, 1972
- Sally R. Welch, Associate Director, 1974
- Nan Bayster Ridgeway, Director of Accreditation, 2005
- Robert S. Chalifoux, Director of Media and Events, 2005
- Lissette D. Hubbard, Accreditation Associate, 2007
- Brianna L. Bates, Information and Accounts Specialist, 2009

For the academic and professional qualifications of the DETC Staff, please visit the website at www.detc.org and select “About Us.”

Powers and Responsibilities of the Commission

The powers and responsibilities of the Commission are to:

- establish and circulate criteria for the evaluation and accreditation of distance education and organizations;
- establish its operating budget and provide for a schedule of reasonable fees which will assure the financial stability of the Commission;
- receive applications from institutions desiring accreditation;
- appoint qualified evaluators and subject specialists and provide for a comprehensive evaluation procedure;
- review the Chair’s reports and all other pertinent material and accredit or withhold accreditation from applicant institutions;
- issue a directory of accredited organizations (*DETC Directory of Accredited Institutions*—available on DETC’s website) and maintain a website in which institutions will be identified in a manner which indicates their program offerings;
- make available to the public current information covering the criteria for accreditation and the operation of the Commission;
- re-evaluate at reasonable intervals the accredited organizations’ programs, organization, and courses of study; and
- exercise such other powers as are necessary to carry out the functions of a reputable, nationally recognized accrediting association.

Commission’s Scope and Mission

The DETC Accrediting Commission’s scope of recognition comes from two sources: The U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation:

Department of Education’s Scope of Recognition: “The accreditation of postsecondary institutions in the United States that offer degree programs primarily by the distance education method up to and including the professional doctoral degree, and are specifically certified by the agency as accredited for Title IV purposes; and the accreditation of postsecondary institutions in the United States not participating in Title IV that offer programs primarily by the distance education method up through the professional doctoral degrees.”

CHEA’s Scope of Recognition: “The accreditation of higher learning institutions in the United States and international locations that offer programs of study that are delivered primarily by distance (51% or more) and award credentials at the associate, baccalaureate, master’s, first professional, and professional doctoral degree level.”

DETC defines “professional doctoral degree” to mean a post-master’s graduate level degree that prepares individuals through internships, practical application of training, and/or specialized certifications, for professional practice (such

as the Doctor of Business Administration), as opposed to research methodologies that are associated with academic doctorate degrees (such as the Doctor of Philosophy).

Its mission is to promote, by means of standard-setting, evaluation, and consultation processes, the development and maintenance of high educational and ethical standards for education and training programs delivered through distance learning. The DETC Accrediting Commission identifies and accredits distance education institutions and training providers that have attained and maintained the standards deemed necessary to operate at a minimum level of quality.

The Commission applies its standards and policies in a manner that respects the mission of an institution, including those with faith-based or religious missions, in ensuring that the educational programs are of sufficient quality to achieve the stated objectives and mission.

The Accrediting Commission's scope of activity includes the accreditation of both correspondence education institutions *and* distance education institutions as defined above.

Eligibility Requirements

Before the Commission will officially accept an institution's initial "Application for Accreditation," the institution has the burden of proof in demonstrating that it meets the following eligibility criteria:

- The institution must be a "bona fide" distance education institution and/or training provider, which is defined by the Accrediting Commission as "an educational institution or organization whose primary purpose is providing education or training which (1) formally enrolls students and maintains student records; (2) retains a qualified faculty to service students; (3) provides educationally sound and up-to-date curricula that are supported by quality instructional materials and appropriate technology; (4) provides continuous two-way communication on student work, e.g., evaluating students' examinations, projects, and/or answering queries, with prompt feedback given to students; and (5) offers courses of instruction which must be studied **predominantly at a distance** (51% or more) from the institution or organization." That is, distance education should be the primary method of study for the majority of students, and distance education courses should comprise the majority of curricula offerings of the institution.
- The institution must be properly licensed, authorized, exempted, or approved by the applicable state educational institutional authority (or its equivalent for non-U.S. institutions). The institution must also be in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements. Exemptions from state law must be supported with State-issued documentation.
- At the time of the initial application, the institution must have been enrolling students in the current programs for two consecutive years and under the present ownership (no new programs may be added during the two year period).
- The applicant institution must be able to document—via an audited or reviewed comparative financial statement that covers its two most recent fiscal years—that it is financially sound and that it can meet its financial obligations to provide instruction and service to its students.
- The applicant must show that the name being used by the institution is free from any association with any activity that could damage the standing of the Commission or of the accrediting process, such as illegal actions, unethical conduct, or abuse of consumers.

- The institution, the institution’s owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations and show a record of integrity and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The owners, board members and executive staff must have records free from any association with any misfeasance, including, but not limited to, owning, managing or controlling any educational institutions that have entered bankruptcy or have closed with students having been disadvantaged as a result.
- The institution agrees that as part of the application process, its owners, officers and managers may be subject to a background check by DETC, which may include, but not be limited to, DETC surveys of State educational oversight agencies, Federal departments and agencies, consumer protection agencies, checks on the credit history, prior bankruptcy, criminal background, debarment from Federal Student Aid Programs, the closing of educational institutions in which they were owners, managers or principals, or the loss of accreditation or state approval to operate an educational institution. The costs of such background checks will be borne by the Applicant.
- The institution’s “Application for Accreditation” must be complete in all respects.

The institution has the burden of proof in showing that its curricula are within the Accrediting Commission’s recognized scope of authority. The Accrediting Commission reserves the right to limit its reviews to the kinds of institutions and types of programs that fall within its recognized scope and decline to consider institutions and programs for accreditation which fall outside the Accrediting Commission’s scope, competence, or where it is felt that there is a lack of adequate standards to permit a meaningful evaluation.

As stated in C.24. Policy on Non-U.S. Institutions, if a distance education institution located outside the United States wishes to apply for accreditation, it must petition the DETC Accrediting Commission and request that its application be accepted. Applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

The Commission also requires that **all** distance education courses, programs, divisions, and/or affiliates of the ownership undergo the accreditation process. The failure of one distance education program and/or division to apply for or achieve accreditation within a time frame set by the Commission renders **all distance education programs or divisions** ineligible for accreditation. In addition, if one distance education course, program, division, and/or affiliate of the ownership is ineligible to apply for accreditation, including ineligibility due to the limits on DETC’s scope of activity, then all “divisions” of that ownership will be deemed to be ineligible to apply for accreditation.

Third-Party Comments

As part of the accreditation process, the Commission gives its relevant internal and external constituencies the opportunity to comment on any institution applying for accreditation or reaccreditation (see D.13. Third-Party Comments). DETC posts the names of applicants on its website and several of its publications (*DETC News*, *DETC Bulletins*, and *Washington Memo*) typically 2-3 months before the next regularly schedule Commission meeting. Constituencies are invited to provide information by a given date. In addition, as part of the review process, DETC also surveys students, Better Business Bureaus, and consumer protection agencies, as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Trade Commission, and state and departments of education.

Unethical Behavior

If, for any reason, the Commission suspects any type of unethical behavior, including fraud and abuse, by an applicant or accredited institution, the Commission reserves the right to investigate the allegations. The Commission is obligated under Federal regulations [CF 602.27(a)(6)] to report to the Secretary of Education any institution it has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud and abuse.

Grants of Initial Accreditation

The Commission will extend a grant of accreditation to initial applicants for a maximum of three years, with the condition that a new Self-Evaluation Report be submitted and an examining committee visits the institution to verify the SER and gather additional information. The normal five year reaccreditation review procedures will be applied for this three year renewal of accreditation (with the exception of curricula reviews).

Communicating with the Commission

Individuals seeking further information about the Accrediting Commission may consult:

- in person, by appointment
- by mail to: DETC, 1601 18th Street, NW, Suite 2, Washington, D.C. 20009-2529
- by telephone at (202) 234-5100 or fax at (202) 332-1386
- by e-mail at nan@detc.org
- by viewing DETC's home page at "www.detc.org"

Receipt of all mailed communications is assumed to be received by the addressees by the fifth calendar day after being post marked.

The Process of Accreditation

Steps in the Accreditation Process

Since accreditation is a voluntary process, each institution must make its own choice on whether or not to seek accreditation. Institutions desiring accredited status are expected to take the initiative in going through a series of steps outlined below. Institutions seeking accreditation or reaccreditation assume the burden of proof in presenting themselves as meeting the established standards. The steps in the accreditation process are:

1. Obtain the *DETC Accreditation Handbook*, Complete DETC Course, Review Application, and Begin Writing SER

Institution receives the *DETC Accreditation Handbook* and reviews it carefully: The Accrediting Commission’s comprehensive publication on accreditation, the *DETC Accreditation Handbook*, is sold for \$50 (U.S.). It is available from DETC’s website at no charge (www.detc.org, select “Publications” and “Accreditation Handbook”). The Handbook is updated every January, however, changes may occur throughout the year. Institutions should check DETC’s website for the most up-to-date version of the documents. For institutions undergoing the reaccreditation process, information is sent to them in the preceding year advising them of their upcoming reaccreditation review.

Enroll and Complete Course: A key person must enroll in and complete the *DETC’s Course on Preparing for Accreditation* to qualify as a Compliance Officer. The course is available online or in print (for no charge) from DETC’s website at www.detc.org, “Member Services” tab (use the word “guest” for the user name and password) and select “Publications.” This course must be completed **before** submitting the Application for Accreditation and before writing the SER. DETC will not accept an application without proof that someone has completed this course.

Review Application: The CEO/President must review the “Application for Accreditation” (Appendix E.2.) to make certain the institution meets the eligibility requirements and understands all that is required in the accreditation process.

Begin Writing the SER: The Compliance Officer and staff begin writing the institution’s Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is prepared in accordance with the provisions of the “Guide to Self-Evaluation” found in Appendix B. The SER provides data on all areas of an institution’s operation, history, course offerings, student services, finances, etc. The self-evaluation includes a wide gathering and analysis of pertinent data on all aspects of the institution and its work. It should, above all else, be a truly self-analytical document that identifies an institution’s particular strengths and challenges. It should reveal the philosophy, organization, specific practices and procedures (documented wherever possible), the success of different operations, and the outcomes of the educational process including the degree to which the institution is accomplishing its stated objectives. Data should not be amassed routinely, but in a constant search for new meanings, new methods and procedures, new hypotheses, and new ideas for improvement.

Even though the Compliance Officers is the key person who oversees the writing of the SER, it is recommended that as many key personnel/stakeholders as possible help to write the SER. Preparing the SER is a great learning experience for everyone. When writing the SER, the name of a contact person should be assigned to each standard. This helps the evaluators to determine whom to interview during the on-site visit.

Preparing the Self-Evaluation Report may take only a few months for a small institution to as many as nine months for a large institution. Institutions are instructed to allow sufficient time for writing, editing, and revising the Self-Evaluation Report. This is a key document in the institution's quest for accreditation!

2. Submit Application and Other Required Information

Institution submits application with application fee: To initiate the accreditation process, the Application for Accreditation (found in Appendix E.2.), and the \$3,000 accreditation fee (or \$1,000 reaccreditation fee), must be submitted to the Commission. Initial applicants must submit the required financial statements (see C.10. Policy on Financial Statements) with their application. Initial application must also submit their SER no later than 60 days after submitting their Application. The Accrediting Commission accepts applications from “eligible” institutions (see page 17) that have been operating as a **bona fide** distance education institution or organization and enrolling students for at least **two** years under the present ownership and with the present programs. The CEO must sign the “Certification of Application” in the Application. In doing so, the CEO agrees that at least one key person has completed the course, *DETC Course on Preparing for Accreditation*. Upon receipt of the Application, the Commission staff consults with the institution as needed. Receiving the Application *begins* the formal process. The steps obligated in the accreditation process must be taken within 12 months after application is made.

Institutions submits students names, catalogs, and copy of state licensure: The names and addresses (mailing and e-mail addresses) of the first 100 students consecutively enrolled with the institution beginning on the first day of the 18th month preceding the date of the application must be submitted on self-adhesive mailing labels or e-mail addresses. If you have fewer than 100 students, submit all the names and addresses. Insofar as possible, the number of students must reflect the same proportion of the enrollments for each of the institution's major course offerings. For example, if you have 100 students enrolled in two separate courses, then approximately one-half of the students on the mailing labels or e-mail addresses should be from each respective course. Institutions must also enclose a copy of its catalog(s) and a copy of its state license.

DETC posts names of applicants for accreditation on its website and publications: The name of the institution applying for reaccreditation is published in DETC publications (*DETC News*, *DETC Bulletin*, *Washington Memo*, etc.) and website (www.detc.org), and the public is requested to send any comments they may have to the Accrediting Commission by a given date. The name of an initial applicant will not be published in DETC's publications or posted on DETC's website until after it has been notified of a successful Readiness Assessment.

3. Undergo Readiness Assessment (*Initial Applicants Only*)

Initial applicants must submit two copies of its SER (no later than 60 days from the date of application). Once DETC receives these documents, the Director of Accreditation (Nan Ridgeway) will coordinate a review by an evaluator for a Readiness Assessment (see C.12.). The evaluator reviews the SER and writes a report stating if the institution is deemed “ready” to undergo a full on-site visit. Then the institution proceeds to the next step. If the institution is not deemed “ready,” then it must correct the areas of concern and submit an updated SER to be reviewed again before proceeding with the accreditation process.

4. Submit Course Materials, DETC Schedules On-Site Visit and Surveys Students

Institution submits courses materials for review: C.5. Policy on Course/Program Approvals provides the details on what course materials are required to be submitted as part of the accreditation process.

An institution undergoing reaccreditation must also follow the directions in C.5. Submissions also include advertisements, catalog, enrollment agreement(s), examinations and examination solutions, and all tools, kits, and equipment provided with the course(s). Course materials submitted as part of an institution's application for accreditation **are not** returned to the institution; they are consumed in the review process.

Subject matter experts, who are also called “subject specialists,” are selected to review and report on the institution's course materials. All Subject Specialists go through a training program and sign DETC's D.8. Conflict of Interest Policy and D.8.1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form before reviewing courses/programs. Typically, these reviews take place in the subject specialists' home or office. However, if an institution offers a combination distance study-resident program, offers a degree program, or has an extremely large number of courses (e.g., a military institute), then one or more subject specialists are appointed to visit the institution for an on-site review during the full on-site visit. Each subject specialist submits to the Accrediting Commission written report on the courses reviewed.

Date of Visit is Set: A mutually convenient on-site examination date is coordinated with the institution. Since a majority of the review process is completed before the on-site visit, most on-site visits are one to two days, depending upon the size of the institution. In cases where resident training is provided as a required or as an optional part of a distance education course, the training facilities are examined to make sure that outcomes of resident training contribute to the total course objectives.

Students Surveyed: The students are asked to complete a survey form (either electronically or paper-based) which contains questions about enrollment practices, lessons, student services, and student satisfaction with the course(s) and the institution.

In addition, the Commission staff also surveys Better Business Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, various consumer protection agencies, accrediting associations, and federal and state regulatory agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Federal Trade Commission, and the U.S. Department of Education, for information on the educational services, business ethics, and general reputation of all applicant institutions.

5. Submit SER, Receive Subject Specialist Reports, and Respond to Comments

Institution Submits SER: The Compliance Officer completes and sends the institution's SER. This is done at least **4 to 6 weeks** before the on-site visit. If an applicant institution is deemed ready for a full on-site review, it must revise its SER by incorporating the improvements made since the Readiness Assessment.

As instructed by the Director of Accreditation, the institution must send the Self-Evaluation Report. In addition, the institution must provide the appropriate instructions and passwords for full access to the institution's website and/or online courses. This allows members of the examining committee to review the appropriate items/content *before* the on-site visit. See B.1. Guide to Self-Evaluation Report for instructions on writing and sending the SER.

Examining Committee is Selected: The Examining Committee is not limited in size, but usually includes a Chair, an Educational Standards Examiner, a Business Standards Examiner, Subject Specialists for each subject area (who may or may not visit the institution), and an Observer for the Accrediting Commission. An Examining Committee is appointed to visit the institution for the purpose of verifying the information in the Self-Evaluation Report, and to gather additional facts for the Accrediting Commission. Once the examiners are selected, their names are submitted to the institution. The institution may object, with an adequate reason, to a specific examiner and request that another examiner be chosen.

Examiners (also called evaluators) are selected from among educators, executives, and practitioners in business, technical, and service fields. To become a qualified examiner, one must complete the distance education course entitled “DETC Evaluators Training Program” and receive a certificate of completion. The Commission develops and maintains a record of the qualifications of people who have been trained as examiners. All evaluators must read, agree to, and sign DETC’s D.8. Conflict of Interest Policy, D.8.1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form, and D.9. Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators. The Commission strongly stresses to each examiner the need for confidentiality before, during, and after the on-site visit. Evaluators with a conflict of interest with an applicant institution are not appointed to serve on the applicant’s examining committee.

State Observers are Invited: Representatives from state licensing bodies and from federal agencies are notified of forthcoming visits and are invited to participate as observers in the process. They are encouraged (but not required) to submit written reports to the Chair at the conclusion of the visit.

DETC Sends Subject Specialist Reports and Student Surveys to the Institution: The DETC provides the Subject Specialist Reports and Student Surveys received to the institution prior to the Examining Committee’s visit so that institutional representatives can prepare for questions from the visiting committee.

Institution addresses any not met findings from subject specialists: If the institution receives any “Partially Meets” or “Does Not Meet” findings for a standard from the subject specialists, it must submit a written response. The institution’s response should be sent to DETC at least two weeks prior to the on-site visit. The written responses are given to the Educational Standards Evaluator and subject specialist(s) before the on-site visit. They review the responses to determine whether the courses deficiencies have been corrected and whether the course is now approved.

Examiners Receive and Review SER, Subject Specialist Reports, and Student Surveys: An electronic copy of the SER is sent to each evaluator by the institution. For initial applicants, the evaluators also get a copy of the institution’s Readiness Assessment Report. DETC sends the Subject Specialist Reports, the response to the subject specialist reports, and Student Surveys to the on-site team prior to the on-site visit. When special examinations are ordered, SERs are also required before the on-site visits. While on-site visits are required for all institutions seeking accreditation or reaccreditation, they may or may not be required for institutions submitting interim progress reports.

Whenever possible, the SER is sent by the institution to each examiner 4 to 6 weeks prior to the on-site visit. Each examiner reads the SER carefully and uses the “Rating Form for All Institutions” to consider the institution’s responses to each question and any appropriate policy. The examiners make notes of any questions not answered in the SER or areas in which they may have concerns. The examiners use their notes to form questions to be asked or items to be checked during the on-site visit. The examiners are not limited to the questions on the rating form, and they are encouraged to ask their own questions as they confirm an institution’s compliance with the standards.

Complaint Summary is Prepared: The Accrediting Commission has a formal procedure for handling complaints lodged against an institution (see C.20). A summary of any complaints received on an institution that is undergoing accreditation or reaccreditation is compiled and presented at the executive breakfast meeting on the day of the on-site visit.

6. Institution Undergoes On-Site Visit and Examiners Write Reports

Institution undergoes the on-site visit: During the visit, the questions asked by the examiners and the methods of inquiry help safeguard impartial judgment. Each examiner develops a comprehensive picture of the institution's operations *before* the visit by doing a thorough review of the SER. Information provided in the report is verified at the time of the visit. The Examiner's Rating Form directs Examining Committee members in their inquiries. Also, the presence of an Accrediting Commission observer helps ensure objectivity, impartiality, uniformity, and adherence to established procedures.

At the time of the on-site visit, it is vital that all key staff members are present or available, including faculty, principal managers, outside accountants, and instructors. Members of the Examining Committee will want to interview many of the key staff members during the on-site visit. School representatives and the Educational Standards Evaluator (and possibly the Chair) will want to discuss the Subject Specialist Reports and student survey results (if previously forwarded) during the on-site visit.

Evaluators test and verify information in the SER: Below are details for the on-site visit. The Committee members will work in their area of expertise during the examination. They will interview administrators, officials, staff, students, and examine files, review records, verify data, and assemble relevant information to aid in preparing their individual reports.

Chair informs the institution when to expect the Chair's Report: At the end of the visit, the Chair will meet with the CEO/President and tell him/her when s/he may expect to receive the Chair's Report (approximately one month after the visit).

Evaluators write reports and send them to the Chair: Each examiner completes the appropriate sections of the "Examiner's Rating Form for All Institutions" and writes a report using the templates provided. Each report is a narrative stating his/her findings and recommendations and expanding on or explaining any "not met" ratings. Once again, the examiners are not limited by the questions on the rating form. They are encouraged to explore any related characteristics and activities that help to determine whether the institution meets each of the standards.

Observer's and CEO's comments are solicited: Any observers/representatives from state licensing bodies and/or federal agencies are strongly encouraged to send their comments to the Commission and the Chair. Their comments should address any issues concerning the institution's compliance with state or federal regulations or the accrediting process itself. The CEO's comments are solicited immediately following the on-site visit and prior to the receipt of the Chair's Report.

Commission surveys on-site evaluators: After the on-site visit, the Commission surveys the examiners for any comments they may have on the institution's SER, the on-site visit, and the accreditation process. If a state observer went on the on-site visit, the Commission may send the observer a copy of the Chair's Report and the institution's response to the Chair's Report if requested.

7. Chair Writes & Submits Report and Institution Responds

Chair writes report and sends it to DETC: Once the Chair receives all of the examiners' reports, s/he prepares a Chair's Report. The purpose of the Chair's Report is to present to the Accrediting Commission a thorough, succinct, and accurate statement of the findings of the Examining Committee. It presents a composite view of the findings of Committee members and subject specialists on the policies, conditions, and practices of the institution as measured against the published standards for accredited institutions. The Chair's Report also summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Subject Specialist reports.

In the Chair's Report, the strengths and the deficiencies of the institution are noted. The Report lists Committee findings and presents Committee recommendations on how an institution might take action to bring existing policies, practices, materials, or services into accord with specific standards and policies. The Chair's Report does not, however, make a recommendation to the Accrediting Commission as to the overall approval or disapproval of the institution's application for accreditation. The Chair sends his/her report to the Director of Accreditation. The Director of Accreditation does not edit or make changes to the Chair's Report.

DETC sends the Chair's Report to the institution for comment: A copy of the Chair's Report is forwarded, approximately four to five weeks after the on-site visit, to the CEO of the applicant institution for comment and response before the Accrediting Commission takes action. This procedure provides the institution with the opportunity to respond to Committee findings as well as to report on any corrective actions taken subsequent to the visit. The institution has 30 days from the receipt of the Report to comment on the Report to provide comments and to submit additional material if appropriate.

8. Commission Reviews, Takes Action and Announces Decision

Commission reviews surveys, Chair's Report, and the Institution's Response to the Chair's Report: The Accrediting Commission usually meets twice a year, in January and in June, to take action on the institutions' applications for accreditation. At its meeting, the Commission reviews information and documentation on the various applications for initial accreditation or reaccreditation. The Commission looks at the SER; the Chair's Report; the Institution's Response; subject specialists reports, student surveys; any complaints from the public; information gathered from other interested parties and any responses to the public notices; institution's advertisements and catalog; any communications between the institution and the Accrediting Commission; and other relevant documentation.

Commission makes decision and informs institution: As described in Appendix D.1.1., the Commission may take one of four courses of action:

1. accredit a new applicant institution, or continue an institution's accredited status (the maximum grant of accreditation for new applicants is three years). Reports of institutional enhancements of programs and services may be required.
2. defer a decision for a period not to exceed a maximum of 12 months (unless the Commission decides the time period should be extended for "good cause"), pending receipt of a Progress Report, or submission of additional information and, possibly, a follow-up on-site visit;
3. direct the institution to Show Cause; or
4. deny accreditation to an applicant, or withdraw accreditation from an accredited institution (this action is appealable).

The Commission will notify the institution within 30 days of its decision. If the Commission votes to deny or withdraw accreditation, the institution is sent a statement of the reasons for denial and the institution may appeal of the decision of the Commission. As described in Appendix D.2. Appealing Commission's Adverse Decision, a special appeals panel will hear the appeal at the earliest practical time. If an institution is denied accreditation or if accreditation is withdrawn, and the action becomes final, the institution must wait one year from the date of the Commission's final decision before making application for accreditation again.

All judgments of the Accrediting Commission are final. They are not subject to review or veto by DETC members.

Commission announces decision: After a final decision is made, the Accrediting Commission notifies other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies, state and federal agencies, and the public about accreditation status of institutions and any adverse actions taken or a show cause decision as described in Appendix D.3. Notification and Information Sharing. Announcements of accreditation, reaccreditation, denial, and/or withdrawal of accreditation or a show cause directive are made in DETC publications (*DETC News*, *DETC Bulletin*, *Washington Memo*, etc.) and the website. After the final decision is announced, the Commission purges its files and keeps only the reports and information specified in its file retention policy (D.4. Retention of Commission Files and Records).

The On-Site Visit

The following briefly describes the procedures for the on-site examination:

- **Executive Meeting:** Prior to arrival at the institution, the Committee members meet at an executive meeting, which is held at the hotel where the examiners are staying. The group discusses and reviews the SER, subject specialists' reports, the institution's response, any complaints received from the public and/or students, and the student surveys received. During this meeting, the Committee develops a schedule of activities for the day. The Chair reviews specific responsibilities of the each Committee member and any updates or changes to standards, policies and/or procedures.
- **Tour of Institution:** Upon arrival at the institution, the Committee meets with the head of the institution and others on the faculty and administrative staff. The purposes of this meeting are to provide for mutual acquaintances, to agree upon a schedule and plan of procedure, to have the CEO state the institution's philosophy and purpose, and to describe the institution's organization and office layout. The Committee members are shown to a private room that will serve as their "headquarters" while on the visit. A brief tour of the facilities is conducted. The Committee members note where key officials or staff are located so that they may interview them later. The Committee members do **not** ask questions during the tour.
- **Examiners Interview Staff:** The Committee members visit various departments to conduct interviews with the institution's staff/administrators. Each Committee member works in his or her own area of expertise during the examination and meets with the entire Examining Committee periodically during the review. Committee members may work alone or together depending upon the size and complexity of the institution. Most interviewing is conducted using one-on-one interviews. However, in larger institutions, a Committee member may meet with small groups of officials. Committee members work from the documents, take notes, examine files, review records, verify data, and assemble relevant information to aid in preparing their individual reports. Committee members will also want to interview instructors at the institution or by telephone, and/or students.
- **Working Luncheon:** A working, "executive session" lunch for the Committee members is arranged to afford examiners an opportunity to consolidate their notes, assess their progress, and discuss among themselves any changes in the visitation schedule which appear to be necessary. The lunch is made available in the Committee's meeting room and is provided by the institution.
- **Summary Meeting:** After the interviews are finished, the Committee meets back at their headquarters at the end of the visit to consolidate notes and to ensure that all areas have been reviewed and the appropriate people interviewed.

- **Exit:** There is no “exit interview” with the CEO of the institution. The visit ends with a brief meeting between the Chair and the CEO. The Chair may ask for further information that the Committee will need for its report and informs the CEO of an approximate date when he or she may expect to receive a copy of the Chair’s report. The Chair thanks the CEO for the cooperation and hospitality received. Because this meeting takes place before the examiners have had an opportunity to reflect on all information gained and conditions observed and before they have had time to prepare their reports, the Chair does not discuss the findings of the Committee. Because judgment regarding accreditation rests solely with the Accrediting Commission, neither the Chair nor any member of the Committee is authorized to say anything that implies acceptance or rejection of the institution by the Commission. The fact that the institution knows it will be receiving a written report of Committee findings prior to Commission action mitigates any need for an “exit interview” or need for Committee members to indicate “how they feel” about the institution.

Right to Appeal

The institution may appeal an action of the Commission to deny or terminate accreditation. A statement of the procedure for appeals may be found in Appendix D.2. Appealing Commission’s Adverse Decisions. The “Application for Appeal” is found in Appendix E.3.

Arbitration

Institutions applying for accreditation from DETC, as well as accredited institutions, agree to observe DETC’s post-appeal hearing arbitration procedures as outlined in Appendix D.2. Appealing Commission’s Adverse Decision.

Maintaining Accreditation

In order for an institution to maintain its eligibility for accreditation on an ongoing basis, it must be in continuous compliance with all accrediting standards, policies, and eligibility requirements. This means, among other things, that an institution must: be in continuous operation in terms of educating or training bona fide students in accordance with its primary objectives; fulfill all DETC reporting requirements in a timely manner; maintain any applicable state license or approval in its state of domicile; maintain compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements; and pay all DETC dues and fees, as well as on-site evaluation fees as required, on a timely basis.

The burden of proof in demonstrating compliance with standards rests with the institution, **not** with the Accrediting Commission.

Should an accredited institution lose its required state licensure in its state of domicile for whatever reason, DETC accreditation terminates as of the date of the loss of state licensure.

Obligations of Accreditation

Accreditation brings with it a number of obligations for the institution. An accredited institution must continue to meet all Accreditation Standards and Business Standards, and it must continually strive to improve itself. Having been recognized by the Commission, the institution must continue to justify the confidence placed in it and modify itself in areas that may have been identified as weak. Accredited institutions are obligated to:

• **File an Annual Report:** Each accredited institution is required to file an Annual Report form (see Appendix E.6. or 7.) to the Accrediting Commission. The institution also has the continuing obligation to advise the Commission of significant changes to what it had originally represented upon its initial accreditation or reaccreditation (see Appendix C.1. Policy on Substantive Change and Notification).

As part of the Annual Report, the institution must report its data on its course completion and program graduation rates. It must also submit data on students' satisfaction as demonstrated by the percent of students who answer "yes" to the three mandatory questions as described in C.14. Policy on Student Achievement and Satisfaction.

• **Pay Annual Dues and Accreditation Fees:** An accredited institution is charged an annual Accreditation Fee to help sustain the accreditation process (see Appendix E.1.). As a member of DETC, each member institution is charged annual Dues. These Dues support the research and professional activities of the Council. The Dues and Fees are based on annual tuition receipts. An institution must submit a completed "Computation for Dues and Fees Form" (see Appendix E.10.). A statement is sent to the institution indicating the amount of Dues and Accreditation Fees owed. Dues and Fees not paid in full by April 30th are charged a late fee. Accredited institutions failing to meet their financial obligations to the Accrediting Commission and the Council by the end of the fifth month of DETC's fiscal year (August 31st) will be directed to undergo a special accrediting review if the obligations are not met by the end of the sixth month (September 30th).

• **Teach-Out Commitment:** The institution should also be mindful of its formal commitment to "teach out" all students who enroll in its distance study programs irrespective of changes in the institution's accreditation status (see Appendices E.8. and E.9.). The institution should update the Teach-Out Commitment and send it to the Accrediting Commission when there are changes in the institution's ownership, management, or location. Institutions must also submit a Teach-Out Plan if required (see Appendix C.27. Policy on Teach-Out Plans).

• **New and Revised Courses:** The institution must inform the Commission whenever it adds or revises a course/program. C.5. Policy on Course/Program Approval gives detailed information on what must be submitted to fulfill the institution's obligation.

• **Correct any Incorrect or Misleading Information:** As stated in Business Standard I.B.9., an accredited institution is required to issue public correction to all incorrect or misleading information knowingly or unknowingly released in reference to its accreditation status, the contents of reports of the examining committee from accreditation-related visits, and/or any actions taken by the Accrediting Commission with respect to the institution.

• **Maintain being properly licensed, authorized or approved:** As stated in the Business Standards, no accredited institution may retain accreditation if it is not properly licensed, authorized or approved by the applicable state educational institution authority. Institutions must conform to all the provisions of applicable laws and regulations.

• **Advise Commission in a Timely Way:** An accredited institution must promptly inform the Commission of any actions it plans to take itself or actions taken against it by other agencies if those actions could affect its good status in the eyes of the Commission or the public, and resolve complaints in a forthright, prompt, amicable, and equitable manner. Members should make periodic contact with the staff of the Commission apprising them of governmental and media actions which may affect their institutions or the Commission.

• **Advise Commission of Substantive Changes:** It is the duty of the Accrediting Commission to make certain that any substantive change an accredited institution makes does not adversely affect its capacity to continue to meet DETC's standards of accreditation. Institutions must obtain the Commission's approval before the change in the institution's scope of accreditation is granted. C.1. Policy on Substantive Change and Notification defines what is considered to be a "substantive change."

- **Participate in Evaluations:** One way an institution’s staff can continue to learn, improve, and also contribute to the DETC is by actively participating in the evaluation of other institutions which are being considered for accreditation. The Commission conducts training sessions through its online course entitled “DETC Evaluators Training Program,” where school officials are instructed in how to be an effective evaluator.
- **Renew Accreditation:** An accredited institution must take the steps necessary to renew its accreditation at least every five years (three years for initial accreditation). After this time, without affirmative action by the Accrediting Commission to continue or renew the institution’s accreditation, the accreditation expires as of the date determined by the Commission. The Commission staff will send the institution a reminder to make application for reaccreditation and to submit the “Application for Accreditation” form (see Appendix E.2 or E.3.) by the date specified. Once the institution is re-accredited, the staff will issue a reaccreditation certificate citing the original date of accreditation and the reaccreditation date.

Failure to Meet Obligations

If at any time an institution fails to meet its obligations of accreditation in a timely manner, including failure to pay its financial obligations to DETC, the Accrediting Commission may order a special visit. Details are provided in Appendix C.16. Policy on Special Visits.

Sharing Information with Other Agencies

The Accrediting Commission routinely notifies, as required by federal regulations, other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and state and federal agencies about the status of an institution and any adverse actions.

Decisions of Other Agencies

The Accrediting Commission will promptly review the accreditation of an institution that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency upon notification that another recognized accrediting agency has taken an adverse action with respect to the institution or placed the institution on probation or an equivalent status. The Accrediting Commission will review the institution’s accreditation to determine if it should also take adverse action against the institution.

The Accrediting Commission will not grant initial or reaccreditation to an institution if it has been notified or has reasonable cause to know, that the institution is the subject of:

1. A pending or final action brought by a state agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the state;
2. A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation;
3. A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s accreditation; or
4. Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.

If the Accrediting Commission determines, after review, that the action of the other body does not preclude the Accrediting Commission's grant of accreditation, it will provide to the Secretary of Education, within **30** days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards why the action of the other body does not preclude the Accrediting Commission's grant of accreditation.

Review of Standards

The Accrediting Commission engages in a continuous review of its standards, policies, and procedures. Annually, the DETC's Standards Committee performs a formal review of the adequacy, currency, validity, and reliability of the standards and makes appropriate recommendations (see Appendix D.5.). The Commission invites suggestions for changes to the standards from all interested parties. Periodically, the Commission conducts a Validity and Reliability Survey of higher education officials, DETC members, and other interested parties.

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Revised December 2011

Functions of the Evaluating Committee Members

Chair

- coordinates visit
- assures examiners complete their tasks during visit
- sets date for submission of reports
- prepares Chair's report and submits it to the Director of Accreditation

Educational Standards Evaluator

- evaluates institution using standards, policies, and rating forms
- submits report to Chair and Director of Accreditation
- verifies special areas through documentation and interviews:
 - institutional mission, goals, objectives, curricula, and instructional materials
 - educational services
 - student support services
 - student achievement and satisfaction
 - qualifications of board members, administrators, faculty, officials, staff, and owners
 - admission requirements
 - research, self-improvement, and planning
- reviews comments from subject specialists
- handles special concern by reviewing:
 - student surveys and/or complaints
 - curricula and online systems
 - student records and tracking progression
 - course/program completions
 - examinations and other assessments
 - faculty interaction
 - outcomes assessment plan and data
 - student and faculty files
 - minutes of board, advisory boards, faculty meetings, curriculum committees, etc.
 - strategic plan and other research
 - succession plan

Degree Program Evaluator

- evaluates using standards, policies, and rating forms
- submits report to Chair and DETC
- handles special concerns:
 - reviews program objectives, curriculum, and courses
 - interviews faculty and reviews qualifications
 - reviews student/teacher ratios
 - reviews credit hour policy and verifies data
- reviews comments from subject specialists

Business Standards Evaluator

- evaluates institution using standards, policies and rating forms
 - submits report to Chair and DETC
- verifies special areas through documentation and interviews:
 - admission practices and enrollment agreements
 - advertising and promotional literature
 - control of recruitment personnel
 - financial responsibility
 - compliance with DETC standards on federal student Title IV aid
 - tuition policies, collection procedures, and refunds
 - facilities, equipment, supplies, and record protection
 - research, self-improvement, and planning
- handles special concerns by reviewing:
 - financial statements
 - enrollment agreements
 - refund policies
 - catalog, advertisements and website
 - facilities, equipment, supplies and record protection

Visiting Subject Specialists

- reviews course materials, student assignments/examinations, interaction between students and instructors, etc.
- evaluates institution using standards, policies, and rating forms
- submit reports to Chair and DETC
- interviews faculty and instructors

Staff Member

- coordinates schedules and logistics
- answers questions concerning DETC standards, policies and procedures

State Agency Observer

- participates as a full member of the committee
- provides pertinent information from state files
- observes institution's evaluation and process
- files comments to Commission (optional)

Readiness Evaluator

- reviews Self-Evaluation Report, writes Readiness Assessment Report and determines if the institution is ready for an on-site visit

8 Steps in the Accrediting Process

1. **Obtain DETC Handbook, Complete DETC Course, Review Application, and Begin Writing SER**
 - Institution receives the *DETC Accreditation Handbook* and reviews it carefully
 - Key person enrolls and completes the *DETC Course on Preparing for Accreditation* to qualify as a Compliance Officer
 - CEO/President reviews application for accreditation
 - Compliance Officer and Staff begin writing Self-Evaluation Report (SER)
2. **Submit Application and Other Required Information**
 - Institution submits application with application fee and financial statements
 - Institution submits student names, catalogs, and copy of state licensure
 - DETC posts names of applicants for reaccreditation on website
3. **Undergo Readiness Assessment (*Initial Applications Only*)**
 - Institution submits the SER within 60 days of submitting application
 - Institution undergoes Readiness Assessment
 - If deemed “ready,” institution proceeds to next step and DETC posts name of applicant on website
4. **Submit Course Materials, DETC Schedules On-Site Visit and Surveys Students**
 - Institution submits course materials for review (DETC sends courses to subject specialists)
 - DETC schedules date for on-site visit
 - DETC surveys students and agencies
5. **Sends SER, Receive Subject Specialist Reports, and Respond to Comments**
 - Institution sends SER
 - DETC selects evaluators for the examining committee and invites State Observer
 - DETC sends subject specialists reports to the institution, along with any student surveys received
 - Institution addresses any “not met” findings from subject specialists and sends response to DETC
 - Examiners receive and review SER, subject specialists reports, Readiness Assessment Report, and student surveys
 - DETC prepares complaint summary
6. **Institution Undergoes On-Site Visit and Examiners Write Reports**
 - Institution undergoes on-site visit
 - Evaluators test and verify information in SER
 - Chair informs institution when to expect Chair’s Report
 - Evaluators write reports and send them to the Chair
 - Observer’s and CEO’s comments are solicited
 - Commission surveys on-site evaluators
7. **Chair Writes and Submits Report and Institution Responds**
 - Chair writes report and sends it to DETC
 - DETC sends Chair’s report to institution for comments
 - Institution responds to Chair’s report
8. **Commission Reviews, Takes Action, and Announces Decision**
 - Commission reviews Chair’s report, and the institution’s response to Chair’s report, and other documents
 - Commission makes decision and informs institution
 - Commission announces decision

Introduction to Standards, Guides, Policies, and Procedures

In order to implement the process of accreditation, the Accrediting Commission has approved and published “Standards of Accreditation,” which include the Accreditation Standards and the Business Standards. It is these Standards by which the Commission measures the educational quality, financial responsibility, administrative competency, and general worthiness of an institution for accreditation. They are the true core of the DETC accreditation process, the stated criteria signifying excellence in education or training. In addition, there are several policies that supplement the standards and contain required actions and information.

Appendices are:

Standards: Appendix A: *Accreditation Standards and Business Standards;*

Guides: Appendix B: *the Guide to Self-Evaluation;*

Policies: Appendix C: *Policies* that supplement the standards and contain required actions and information;

Procedures: Appendix D: *Procedures* for handling various functions of Commission; and

Forms: Appendix E: *Fees, Forms, Checklists, and Glossary.*

There are other documents on DETC’s website to help DETC Evaluators (rating forms, guides, sample reports, and other forms) and institutions (critical documents). To view these documents, go to DETC’s website at www.detc.org and select “Membership Services” tab and “Evaluators Documents.” Sign in using “guest” for your user name and password. The templates for writing reports are found under “Templates” under the “Membership Services” tab. If you’re having problems with the forms, please contact Lissette Hubbard at Lissette@detc.org or 202-234-5100 ext. 105.

Policy and Procedure Indexes

DETC policies (Appendix C) and procedures (Appendix D) expand on the accreditation standards. Institutions must meet the Accreditation Standards and the Business Standards inclusive of the requirements listed in the policies and procedures. There are additional tools that are used when preparing reports to the Commission.

The tables on the following page are indexes that will assist institutions in referring to information on special circumstances.

Policy Index

| Circumstance | Policy |
|--|---------------|
| Annual Reports | C.18. |
| Bankruptcy | C.8. |
| Change in Location | C.4. |
| Change in Marketing | C.11. |
| Change in Mission, Goals and Objectives | C.2. |
| Change in Name | C.25. |
| Change of Ownership/Management | C.3. |
| Combination Program (Distance Study-Resident) | C.6. |
| Complaints | C.20. |
| Contracting for Educational Delivery | C.29. |
| Contracting with Non-U.S. Institutions | C.17. |
| Credit Hours | C.23. |
| Degree Programs | C.5. & C.9. |
| Doctoral Degrees | C.5. & C.9. |
| Financial Statements | C.10. |
| First Professional Degrees | C.5. & C.9. |
| Five Year Reaccreditation | C.13. |
| High Schools | C.30. |
| Information Provided to U.S. Department of Education | C.22. |
| Initial Visit | C.5. |
| International Activities | C.17. |
| New Combination Program | C.7. |
| New or Revised Courses/Programs | C.5. |
| New Training site | C.7. |
| Non-Private Institutions | C.19. |
| Non-U.S. Institutions | C.24. |
| Not Meeting Obligations | C.16. |
| Outcomes Assessment | C.14. |
| Petitions to Commission | C.28. |
| Pilot Programs | C.26. |
| Readiness Assessment | C.12. |
| Required Institutional Documents | C.21. |
| Selection and Training of Evaluators | C.23. |
| Special Ordered Visit | C.16. |
| Substantive Change and Notification | C.1. |
| Teach-Out Plans | C.27. |
| Title IV | C.15. |
| Waivers | C.28. |

Procedure Index

| Circumstance | Procedure |
|---|------------------|
| Providing Chair's Report to Institution | D.1. |
| Advising the Institution of Commission's Decision | D.1. |
| Appealing Commission's Decision | D.2. |
| Notifying Agencies of Commission's Decision | D.3. |
| Notifying the Public of Commission's Decision | D.3. |
| Retention of Commission Files and Records | D.4. |
| Reviewing Standards, Policies and Procedures | D.5. |
| Circulating Standards, Policies and Procedures | D.5. |
| Undergoing an On-Site Visit | D.6. |
| Responding to Comments on Course/Program Reviews | D.7. |
| Conflict of Interest | D.8. & D.8.1. |
| Code of Conduct for Evaluators | D.9. |
| Selection and Training of Commissioners | D.10. |
| Selection and Training of Evaluators | D.11. |
| Selection and Training of Appeals Panel Members | D.12. |
| Third-Party Comments | D.13. |

Timeline for Accrediting Process

(Initial Applicant)

| Steps | Activity | Time to Complete | Date |
|--------------|--|--|------|
| ONE | Review DETC Handbook and Application | 6 to 9 months | |
| | Key person enrolls and completes <i>DETC Course on Preparing for Accreditation</i> | | |
| | Begin writing the SER | | |
| TWO | Submit Application and Required Documents | Begins accreditation process | |
| THREE | Submit the SER | Within 60 days of submitting Application | |
| | Undergo Readiness Assessment and receive Report | 90 days of receipt of SER | |
| FOUR | If “ready”* submit course materials | Immediately after receiving Readiness Assessment Report | |
| | Schedule on-site visit | Once curriculum is received | |
| | Submit/send final SER | 4-6 weeks before visit | |
| FIVE | Receive Subject Specialists Reports | 3 months from date of institution’s submission of curriculum | |
| | Respond to comments from Subject Specialists | Within 30 days of receipt of reports | |
| SIX | Have on-site visit | Spring or Fall | |
| SEVEN | Receive Chair’s Report | 30-40 days from date of site visit | |
| | Respond to Chair’s Report | 30 days after receipt | |
| EIGHT | Commission decision | January/June each year | |

Spring visits must take place before April 1st to be considered at the June AC Meeting.

Fall visits must take place before November 1st to be considered at the January AC Meeting.

*If Readiness Assessment Report states that an institution is not ready for a full on-site visit, the process stops until the institution documents to the satisfaction of the assessing evaluator that it has remedied the areas of concern in the Assessment Report before the courses will be reviewed and a full on-site visit scheduled (see C.12. Policy on Readiness Assessment).

Timeline for Accrediting Process (Reaccreditation)

| Steps | Activity | Time to Complete | Date |
|--------------|--|--|------|
| ONE | Review DETC Handbook and Application | 6 to 9 months | |
| | Key person enrolls and completes <i>DETC Course on Preparing for Accreditation</i> | | |
| | Begin writing SER | | |
| TWO | Submit Application and Required Documents | Due November 1 or March 1 | |
| THREE | Submit course work | Two months after application is submitted | |
| FOUR | Schedule on-site visit | Spring or Fall | |
| | Submit/send final SER | 4-6 weeks before visit | |
| FIVE | Receive Subject Specialists Reports | 3 months from date of institution's submission of curriculum | |
| | Respond to comments from Subject Specialists | 2 weeks after receiving | |
| SIX | Have on-site visit | Spring or Fall | |
| SEVEN | Receive Chair's Report | 30-40 days from date of site visit | |
| | Respond to Chair's Report | 30 days after receipt | |
| EIGHT | Commission decides to accredit or not | January/June each year | |

Spring visits must take place before April 1st to be considered at the June AC Meeting.

Fall visits must take place before November 1st to be considered at the January AC Meeting.

If you are to be considered at the June AC meeting (Spring), your application is due November 1st the year before. If you are to be considered at the January AC meeting (Fall), your application is due March 1st of the preceding year.