

5. Reviewing, Adopting, and Circulating Standards, Policies, and Procedures

Procedure for Reviewing, Adopting and Circulating Accrediting Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures

The Accrediting Commission has the power and responsibility to review, establish, and circulate its standards, policies, and procedures for the evaluation and accreditation of distance education institutions.

Origin of Standards, Policies, and Procedures (10/11)

When reviewing its standards, policies, and procedures, the Accrediting Commission considers recommendations from any source and in any manner or form. The following is a list of some sources of recommendations for new or amended standards, policies, and procedures:

1. **Commission:** the Commission reviews its standards, policies, and procedures and any comments received at every meeting;
2. **Commission staff:** if the staff notices areas of the standards, policies, and procedures that need to be strengthened, he or she may make suggestions and recommendations to the Commission;
3. **DETC Committees:** the Research and Educational Standards Committee and the Business Standards Committee continuously work to refine and revise the standards and make recommendations to the Commission;
4. **DETC Evaluators and Subject Specialists:** These reviewers are surveyed after each on-site visit and asked to give suggestions on how to strengthen DETC standards;
5. **State Regulators:** An observer from the state that the institution is located in is invited to observe each on-site visit and asked to provide feedback on standards or the process;
6. **Government agencies:** Input from governmental agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation often leads to changes in DETC standards, policies, and procedures;
7. **Educators, faculty and administrators:** DETC's institutions often employ deans, professors, faculty, administrators, and other educators who work for or have worked at other higher education institutions;
8. **Consumer groups:** DETC surveys the consumer protection agencies (i.e., Better Business Bureaus, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) for their input;
9. **Accredited or applicant institutions:** each institution is encouraged throughout the process to give feedback on the process and DETC's standards, policies, and procedures;
10. **Third-Party review:** As part of its review process, DETC periodically retains an independent organization to review its standards and conduct rigorous validity and reliability surveys;

11. **Students and the general public:** DETC surveys students as part of the accreditation process and their input is solicited. Student complaints and correspondence received by the DETC staff are also used in the review process; and
12. **Industry representatives and employers:** Employers of students who have graduated from DETC institutions are surveyed.

Systematic Program Review (10/11)

As described above, DETC collects information from several sources and seeks input from its communities of interest, including internal and external constituencies. DETC gathers information from these communities regarding whether the standards should be changed before drafting changes to the standards. DETC performs a systematic review of its standards, policies, and procedures through the use of reviews involving its different constituencies, such as third-party, students and employers, evaluators, subject specialists, DETC committees, and the Commissioners. Elements of the review process are:

- Every five years, DETC engages an independent third party organization to survey accredited institutions, DETC evaluators (many of who are faculty at traditional institutions), subject specialists, and students (drops, active and graduates) on the validity and reliability of DETC's Standards and policies. These surveys focus on the adequacy and relevance of the standards in terms of enabling DETC to evaluate the quality of education. The third-party reviewer evaluates DETC standards individually and as a whole.
- DETC Subcommittees collect information from its members and other interested people as part of the review process, and establishes special Task Forces to handle the evaluation of the information to determine whether the standards need to be changed. The Subcommittees, Research and Educational Standards Committee and the Business Standards Committee, meet twice a year (at DETC's Annual Conferences and Fall Workshops).
- DETC staff compiles comments from the surveys conducted of the on-site evaluators and subject specialist and presents them to the Commission at each of its meetings (typically in January and June).
- DETC staff may suggest revisions or additions to standards, policies, and procedures when called for to remain in compliance for recognition from the U.S. Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. This is done on an ongoing basis.
- DETC routinely conducts a survey of graduates of degree programs and their employers and publishes the results. The results of these surveys aid the Commission in identifying any modifications to standards, policies, or procedures needed. This is typically done every 4 to 5 years.
- Interested persons, institutions, and organizations are encouraged to submit comments on existing standards, policies and procedures and make suggestions for additions or revisions. Comments and suggestions are sent to the Executive Director of the Accrediting Commission. This is done on an ongoing basis.

Process and Procedure for Adoption (10/11)

As recommendations for changes to DETC standards, policies, and procedures are collected by DETC staff from the various sources, they are submitted to the appropriate DETC Standing committee. The Research and Educational Standards Committee works on revising language and/or develops new educational and administrative standards, policies, and procedures. The Business Standards Committee handles revisions to the Business Standards. Once approved by the Committees, the recommendations are sent to the Commission. The Commission reviews and considers the recommendations and either approves them as written or makes changes to them and then approves them. Not all changes come through the Committees. If there are circumstances where the Commission itself believes changes are appropriate and called for, such as coming into compliance with Federal laws, the Commissioners work directly with the DETC staff to develop or revise the appropriate documents.

Once the Commission approves the new or revised standards, policies, and procedures, they are sent to the public and stakeholders and other interested parties for comment. Copies of the “Proposed Changes” are sent to people on DETC’s mailing list (member and nonmember institutions, government agencies, other accrediting agencies, and other interested parties) via DETC publications (see below) and comments are solicited by a certain date (at least 30 days). A notice is also posted on DETC’s website so that everyone, including the general public, has a chance to review them and comment. DETC encourages its communities of interest (internal and external), including those that have made their interest known, to comment on any proposed changes.

Typically, the Commission receives the suggested changes or additions to standards, policies, and procedures and any comments received at least 30 days before it meets to allow time for the Commissioners to adequately review all comments before formally adopting the proposed changes as final. The Commission reviews and carefully considers all comments before making a final decision.

The Commission can adopt standards, policies, and procedures as proposed, adopt with changes or modifications, defer action until further study and consideration is given, or reject the proposed new standards or changes outright. When the final standards, policies, and procedures are adopted, the Commission sets the date they will become effective, providing a reasonable time for compliance by the institutions. The entire process typically takes around six months.

The Commission must make the necessary changes within 12 months after determining that, as a result of the review process, changes to standards, policies, and procedures are needed.

Circulation of Accreditation Standards, Policies, and Procedures (10/11)

Once final adoption is given by the Commission, the Executive Director announces to the public and relevant stakeholders any new or revised standards, policies, and procedures and takes the action necessary for their implementation. The effective date of the standards, policies, and procedures for implementation, if required, are included in the announcement, in addition to the date institutions must come into full compliance.

1. Information on new or revised standards, policies, and procedures are posted on DETC’s website and published in DETC publications that are sent to the sources for recommendations listed above.
2. The relevant publications of the Accrediting Commission are revised to include the new standards, policies, and procedures (see below).

3. The *DETC Accreditation Handbook* is revised and updated every January. A copy is sent to each DETC member institution and made available for sale to the public and relevant stakeholders. An “Update Sheet” is also provided noting changes made from the previous edition.
4. DETC provides and makes available on its website to its evaluators and subject specialists an update sheet noting any changes to its standards, policies, and procedures.
5. DETC routinely conducts webinars, seminars or workshop sessions, and issues guidance through Bulletins or e-mails on how to interpret and apply any new standards.
6. DETC includes the new standards in the content of its online training manuals and courses.
7. DETC staff reviews with members of the on-site examining committee’s changes to standards, policies, and procedures before each on-site visit.

Publications (10/11)

In addition to DETC’s website, changes and updates to the DETC standards, policies, and procedures, as well as a list of institutions that are to be considered for initial or reaccreditation are published in the following publications:

- *DETC Bulletins* (as needed)
- *DETC News* (bi-annually)
- *Washington Memo* (monthly)

DETC has several mailing lists, which include:

DETC institutions, key people at the Department of Education and CHEA, other accrediting agencies, applicants, governmental agencies, veterans approving agencies and veterans affairs, other associations, editors and publishers, non-members institutions, universities, consumer protection agencies, Better Business Bureaus, businesses, employers, students, and the general public.

Any one may request through DETC’s website to be put on DETC’s mailing lists.

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