

## Accreditation Standards (Changes in RED – approved for public comment 6/3/11)

These Accreditation Standards serve as benchmarks in helping the institution's staff and faculty evaluate important aspects of their institution's programs. For more than a half century, DETC Committees have developed these standards with the advice and cooperation of outstanding authorities on education and accreditation. The Accrediting Commission has adopted the language below as "Standards." The standards provide a benchmark of minimum acceptable policy and practice for the evaluators and Commissioners as they evaluate an institution as part of the accrediting program. The Accrediting Commission has also adopted and incorporated the *DETC Business Standards* and the appropriate policies (see Appendix A.2.) as standards for accredited institutions. **Please Note: Degree-granting institutions should also refer to C.9. Policy on Degree Programs. For clarification of terms, please see the E.14. Glossary in the DETC Accreditation Handbook.**

The following standards are organized into 12 topical areas and headings, as indicated by the Roman numerals. The Preamble italicized statement after each heading is an "editorial" summary of the **actual** Standards **that follow**. The actual Standards ~~is~~ **are** what follows. There are 50 Standards, in addition to the 49 Business Standards found in Appendix A.2. Accredited distance education institutions possess the following characteristics:

### I. Institution Mission, Goals, and Objectives

*Preamble: The institution has a stated mission that is supported by **separately (or specific)** clearly defined goals and objectives **appropriate to the level of study provided**, including an institutional commitment to providing quality distance education programs.*

#### I. A. Description of the Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The institution has a mission statement that includes its general purpose and is supported by specific, clearly defined goals and objectives **appropriate to the level of study provided**, including an institutional commitment to providing quality distance education programs.

#### I. B. Review and Publication of the Mission Statement

The instructors/faculty, administration, governing board, and institutional advisory committees, if the institution has a governing board and advisory committee(s), regularly review the mission statement, goals, and objectives. The current mission statement, goals, and objectives are widely promulgated and readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

#### I. C. Implementation of the Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The institution can demonstrate that it is effectively carrying out its mission, is attaining its goals and objectives, and is sharing appropriate information on its attainments with relevant groups.

### II. Educational Program Objectives, Curricula, and Materials

*Preamble: The institution has clearly stated and reasonably attainable educational program objectives **and student learning outcomes** and offers educationally sound and up-to-date curricula that are supported by quality instructional materials and appropriate technology.*

## II. A. Description of Program Objectives

Educational program objectives are clearly defined and simply stated. They indicate the benefits for reasonably diligent students. The character, nature, quality, value, source of the instruction, and educational services that are used to help students achieve the objectives are set forth in language understood by the types of students enrolled. If a program prepares for an occupation, field of occupations, or vocation, the objectives clearly state the types of occupations for which preparation is given.

## II. B. Appropriate Program Objectives

The program objectives must be reasonably attainable through electronically delivered, online, or other methods of distance study. Appropriate objectives include the development of skills, providing job-related training, the imparting of knowledge and information, the training in the application of knowledge and skills, and the development of desirable habits and attitudes. Evaluation of the program is based on the announced objectives and the success with which students achieve the objectives.

## II. C. Comprehensive Curriculum

The curriculum is sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated program objectives and its content is supported by sound research and practice.

## II. D. Up-to-Date Curriculum

The curriculum/curricula reflect(s) current knowledge and practice. Effective procedures are used continuously to keep it/them up-to-date. Internal course/program reviews are conducted on a periodic basis.

## II. E. Comprehensive and Up-to-Date Instructional Materials

Instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive to enable students to achieve the announced program objectives. The instructional materials are accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice and are regularly reviewed and revised.

## II. F. Examinations and Other Assessments

Examinations and other assessment techniques ~~adequately measure~~ **are adequate evidence of the achievement of the stated learning objectives and outcomes. The institution must publish its academic grading policies, assignment marking system, course extension policy, and information on issuance and completion of incomplete grades, and apply them with fairness and consistency. (moved from III.A. below)**

## II. G. Authorship

Qualified persons competent in distance study techniques and in their subjects or fields develop the curriculum content and prepare instructional materials.

## II. H. Organization of Instructional Materials

The organization and presentation of the instructional materials are in accord with sound principles of learning and grounded in sound instructional design principles.

## II. I. Curriculum Delivery

Online and written instructional materials are appropriately presented. Online materials fit the content and are delivered using readily available, reliable technology. Institutional prepared materials must be keyed to the reading competence of the students in the program and be legibly reproduced.

## II. J. Study Instructions

Instructions and suggestions on how to study and how to use the instructional materials **are made available to** assist students to learn effectively and efficiently.

## II. K. Educational Media and Learning Resources

Learning resources for faculty and students must be available and appropriate to the level and scope of program offerings. Program designers and/or faculty/instructors make effective use of appropriate teaching aids and learning resources, including educational media and supplemental instructional aids in creating programs and in teaching students. The institution makes effective provisions for students to access learning resources and libraries that are appropriate for the attainment of program learning outcomes.

## II. L. Student Integrity and Identity

The institution has clear, specific, published academic policies related to student integrity and academic honesty. The institution has a student identity verification process that ensures that students who earn the credit or completion credentials are the same students who did the course assignments and assessments.

## III. Educational Services

***Preamble:** The institution and program provide educational services that meet the needs of students. The institution ensures that distance educational services are designed to optimize interaction between the student and the institution in order to encourage and facilitate learning.*

### III. A. Student Inquiries and Submissions

Relevant student inquiries are welcome and are answered promptly and thoroughly. Accurate assessment, correction services, and counseling by instructors/faculty are provided for assignments/lessons and examinations. ~~The institution must publish its academic grading policies, assignment marking system, course extension policy, and information on issuance and completion of incomplete grades, and apply them with fairness and consistency.~~ (move to II.F. above)

### III. B. Individual Differences

Provisions are made to be responsive and flexible to meet the individual differences of students with diverse backgrounds, prior achievements, employment, and other relevant circumstances. Counseling and guidance are provided, as required, to assist students to satisfy institutional and program requirements, to achieve required program objectives and individual course learning outcomes, and to achieve their educational goals.

### III. C. Handling Unsatisfactory Student Progress

Students who are unable to make satisfactory progress through the program are encouraged to continue until they either show inability to make satisfactory progress or demonstrate satisfactory progress.

### III. D. Encouragement of Students

An active program designed to optimize interaction between the institution and the student is followed to encourage students to start, continue, and finish the program in which **they have** ~~he/she has~~ enrolled, **if continuing and finishing are the student's goals.**

### III. E. Student Evaluation of Courses

~~Reactions~~ **Opinions** of students are systematically sought as one basis for evaluating and improving instructional materials, the delivery of instruction, and educational services.

### III. F. Appropriate Technology

The institution uses appropriate and readily accessible technology to optimize interaction between the institution and the learner and enhance instructional and educational services.

### III. G. Resident Training

Resident training **or face-to-face learning sessions** must supplement the electronically delivered, online, or other distance study method whenever it is necessary to attain the stated institutional and program objectives and intended student learning outcomes.

## IV. Student Services

***Preamble:** The institution provides student services that encourage and assist the student to attain institutional and program objectives, intended course learning outcomes, and his/her educational goals.*

### IV. A. Assessment Services

Student assessment services are guided by published grading policies and a marking system that includes prompt return of accurately, fairly, and consistently graded assessments as well as necessary academic counseling by the instructor/faculty or qualified staff member.

### IV. B. Student Records

Essential, accurate student records are adequately **and securely** maintained and readily accessible.

### IV. C. Counseling, Employment, and Alumni Services

Competent counseling is available to students on request. When offered, employment assistance and other services for alumni **and students** are accurately and appropriately presented.

## V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction

~~The institution verifies/demonstrates student success and satisfaction using valid and reliable assessment techniques.~~ **Preamble: The institution verifies/demonstrates student mastery of established learning outcomes, success and satisfaction using valid and reliable assessment techniques that are administered regularly and comprehensively.**

### V. A. Achievement of Student Learning Outcomes and Benefits

The institution articulates student learning outcomes ~~independent of delivery method~~, has a systematic and ongoing process for assessing student learning, ~~and~~ provides documented evidence that show that the results are used to improve programs, curricula, instruction, faculty development, and services, **and the results meet appropriate benchmarked standards.**

### V. B. Student Satisfaction

The institution ~~documents~~ **regularly collects evidence** that students are satisfied with the instructional and educational services provided.

### V. C. Progress Through the Program

The institution documents that students complete their studies at rates that compare favorably<sup>1</sup> to those of courses/programs offered by programs offered by similar DETC-accredited institutions.

<sup>1</sup> “compare favorably” means each program’s graduation rate falls within 15 points of the mean for courses/programs at similar DETC institutions.

## VI. Qualifications of Institution, Owners, Governing Board Members, Administrators, Instructors/Faculty, and Staff

*Preamble:* The institution has ~~competent~~ **qualified** owners, governing board members, administrators, instructors/faculty, and staff.

### VI. A. Institution, Owners, Governing Board Members, and Administrators

The institution, institution’s owners, governing board members, and administrators possess sound reputations and show a record of integrity and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and institution administrators possess appropriate qualifications and experience for their positions and roles and have demonstrated the ability to direct institutional operations successfully. The governing board members are knowledgeable and experienced in one or more aspects of educational administration, finance, teaching/learning, and distance study.

### VI. B. ~~Educational Director~~ Chief Academic Officer

A qualified<sup>2</sup> person serves as the ~~educational director~~ or chief academic officer **or educational director.** This person has overall administrative responsibilities for the educational program(s), **faculty/instructors**, and a policy-making voice in advertising, sales, and collections.

<sup>2</sup> qualifications for degree-granting institutions are described in C.9. Policy on Degree Programs.

### VI. C. Department Heads

In large institutions, qualified department heads or persons with similar titles are delegated educational, editorial, and research responsibilities within departmental subject fields.

**VI. D. Instructors/Faculty**

The institution has a sufficient number of qualified instructors/faculty<sup>3</sup> to give individualized instructional service to each student. The institution maintains files containing the resumes and official transcripts of its instructors/faculty. Faculty are carefully screened for appointment, and are properly and continuously trained with respect to institution policies, learner needs, **instructional approaches and techniques**, and the use of appropriate instructional technology. The institution has clear, consistent procedures to evaluate faculty performance.

<sup>3</sup> qualifications for degree-granting institutions are described in C.9. Policy on Degree Programs.

**VI. E. Professional Growth**

An institution demonstrates its interest in improving instruction through upgrading faculty and staff. Faculty and staff are encouraged to become members of professional organizations, to review and apply relevant research, to pursue continuing education or training in their respective fields, and to enhance their skills in developing and using electronically delivered, online, or other forms of distance study.

**VI. F. Succession Plan (moved from XII.C. below)**

The institution has a written plan ~~for leadership/management succession~~ **that outlines the process by which the leadership and management succession would be approached and realized. Identify specific people, committees, or boards that would be responsible to carry on with the operation of the institution. The plan should be reviewed and revised on an annual basis.**

**VII. Admission Practices and Enrollment Agreements**

*Preamble: The institution's admission practices and enrollment agreements conform to DETC Business Standards.*

**VII. A. Admission Practices**

The admissions policies, requirements, and practices of the institution fully conform to DETC Business Standard II. B.

**VII. B. Enrollment Agreements (Contracts)**

The written enrollment agreement and/or other written enrollment documents specify clearly the nature and scope of the program, the services and obligations of the institution, and the responsibilities, obligations, financial and otherwise, of the student. Any changes in tuition, fees, and program policies and procedures must be made applicable to all future enrollees, not those currently enrolled. The institution must use a written enrollment agreement/contract that conforms to the provisions of DETC Business Standards II. A. and II. B. Students must be given copies of these written agreements/contracts and/or other written documents.

## VIII. Advertising, Promotional Literature, and Recruitment Personnel

*Preamble: The institution advertises its programs truthfully and has adequate control of its sales or recruiting personnel.*

### VIII. A. Advertising and Promotion

All advertising, promotional, and recruitment activities of the institution fully conform to **DETC Business Standard I.A. and B.** and to this accreditation standard.

### VIII. B. Control of Student Recruitment Personnel

The institution's policies and practices in the hiring, training, monitoring, managing, and evaluating of all sales or recruiting personnel fully conform to **DETC Business Standard II.C.** and to this accreditation standard.

## IX. Financial Responsibility

*Preamble: The institution can document that it is financially responsible and is in control of its financial matters. The institution can demonstrate that it will continue to operate as a going concern for the benefit of students, and is capable of producing accurate and timely financial information.*

### IX. A. Financial Practices

The institution shows, by complete, comparative financial statements covering its two most recent fiscal years, that it is financially responsible and that it can meet its financial obligations to provide quality instruction and service to its students. (Financial statements must be prepared "in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles.")

### IX. B. Financial Management

The institution must have at least one person who is qualified and able to prepare accurate financial reports in a timely manner. Internal auditing trails and controls are in place to ensure finances are properly managed, monitored, and protected.

### IX. C. Financial Sustainability

The institution can demonstrate that it is able to continue to operate as a going concern and is not exposed to undue or insurmountable risk. Any risk that exists is adequately monitored, manageable, and insured. Adequate safeguards are in place to prevent unauthorized access to online and on-site financial information.

### IX. D. Demonstrated Operations

In all respects, accredited institutions must document continuous sound and ethical operations, as well as the necessary resources to accommodate demand and to ensure all learners receive a quality educational experience. Applicant institutions must document two continuous years of sound and

ethical operation under the present ownership and with the current programs offered as a bona fide electronically delivered, online, or other delivery method of distance study. This documentation shall show that the name being used by the institution is free from any association with activity that could damage the reputation of the DETC accrediting process, such as illegal actions, unethical conduct, or abuse of consumers.

## IX. E. Financial Reporting

Financial statements are prepared in accordance with DETC Standards and Policies including C.10. Policy on Financial Statements. An independent CPA's audit or reviewed report accompanies these statements, and a written plan is provided that documents how the institution can resolve any challenges or anomalies identified in the CPA's report.

## X. Tuition Policies, Collection Procedures, and Cancellations/Refunds

*Preamble: The institution has fair and equitable tuition, collection, and cancellations/refund policies.*

### X. A. Tuition Policies

Tuition policies are in keeping with the provisions of the **DETC Business Standards Section III.A.**

### X. B. Tuition Collection Procedures

Tuition collection practices and procedures are fair. They encourage the progress of students and seek to retain their good will. The institution exercises its right to protect its finances through collection practices in keeping with sound and ethical business standards. Such practices take into account the comparable rights and interests of the student. **Collection procedures also conform to DETC Business Standard Section III.D.**

### X. C. Tuition Cancellation/Refund Policies

The institution recognizes that there are legitimate reasons why enrolled students may not be able to complete their programs with benefit to themselves. Accordingly, the institution has a policy for equitable tuition adjustments or refunds in such cases that conform to **DETC Business Standards Section III.B. and III. C.** Records are maintained on tuition refunds and enrollment cancellations to provide a reference source for management analysis.

## XI. Plant, Equipment, and Record Protection

*Preamble: The institution has adequate facility, equipment, and record protection.*

### XI. A. Plant and Equipment

Buildings, workspace, and equipment comply with local fire, building, health, and safety regulations and are adequately equipped to handle the educational program(s) of the institution.

**XI. B. Record Protection**

Institutional financial and administrative records and students' educational records are maintained in a reasonably accessible place and are adequately protected as long as they are likely to be needed. Protection may be by: (1) an active fire suppression system, or (2) with passive protection using two-hour rated files or vaults, or (3) by using off-site back up files. Other records are maintained in accordance with current educational, administrative, business, and legal practices.

**XII. Research and Self-Improvement**

*Preamble: The institution conducts continuous planning, evaluation, research, and self-improvement studies and appropriately applies their results.*

**XII. A. Planning and Evaluation**

An accredited institution has a written plan that is designed to identify internal and external trends and patterns, optimize opportunities, address challenges, reflect on achievements, and maintain quality. The planning enables the institution to improve services to students, ensure the professional growth of its instructors/faculty and staff, and provide for the long-term quality and growth of the institution. **The institution collects and analyzes data on a systematic, consistent basis to monitor the status and effectiveness of the plan and evaluates its full range of services.**

**XII. B. Research and Self-Improvement**

An accredited institution shows evidence of continuous progress and self-initiated efforts to improve operations and educational offerings and services. Sound research procedures and techniques are used to measure how effectively the stated institutional mission, goals, and objectives are being met.

**XII. C. ~~Succession Plan (move to VI.F. above)~~**

~~The institution has a written plan for leadership/management succession.~~

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