

## Introduction (approved for public comment 6/3/11)

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.

### The 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 correspondence schools, 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 2011.

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 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? Or, is it a means of evaluating and comparing your courses/programs, facilities, and procedures with those of others? 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 rests with the institution, **not** with the Accrediting Commission. The **institution must prove** 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 is designed for learners who live at a distance from the teaching institution or educational provider. It is the 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. It may incorporate or make use of printed materials, videotapes, audio recordings, facsimiles, telephone communications, and the Internet through e-mail and Web-based delivery systems. When each lesson or segment is completed, the student makes available to the institution the assigned work for correction, grading, comment, and subject matter guidance by qualified instructors. Corrected assignments are returned to the student. This exchange fosters a personalized student-instructor relationship, which is the hallmark of distance education.

To determine an institution's eligibility to participate in Title IV programs, the Commission uses the Federal government's terms and definitions in order to conform to Federal regulations. *Distance education* is defined 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.

**DETC limits eligibility to apply for Title IV programs to degree-granting distance education institutions only. The Accrediting Commission's scope of activity includes the accreditation of both correspondence education institutions and distance education institutions as defined above.**

Originally, most distance education courses were vocational in nature, but today courses are offered for academic, professional, and avocational purposes for students of all ages. There are numerous specialized programs, such as those for blind persons and for personal enrichment. Distance education is available in practically any field, from accounting to zoology. Courses are offered in gemology, high school diploma, journalism, locksmithing, child day care management, yacht design, and many subjects not widely offered in resident schools.

Distance education courses and programs also vary greatly in scope, level, and length. Some have a few assignments and require only a few weeks to complete, while others have a hundred or more lesson assignments requiring three or four years of conscientious study. Some degree programs may take six years or more to complete.

## 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 the *DETC Directory of Accredited Institutions* available on DETC's web site;
- 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, as mentioned above, 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, *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education*, which is published annually by the American Council on 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 web sites;
- authorizes an institution to obtain the coveted ".edu" e-mail and web site 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);
- expedites acceptance of advertising by newspapers, electronic newsletters, magazines, radio and television stations, and other advertising media;
- 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 duly 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.

**Institution Commissioners:** Institution Commissioners are from the distance education field and are CEOs or upper level executives of accredited distance education institutions. **Two of the institution Commissioners must be “academics” directly engaged in distance education teaching and/or research.** The five school Commissioners may serve no more than two full consecutive three-year terms each. The *DETC Constitution and Bylaws* of the Distance Education and Training Council provides: “Commissioners from the distance education field shall be currently active academic or administrative personnel from member institutions that do not have a representative currently serving on the Accrediting Commission.”

**Public Commissioners:** The four Commissioners from outside the distance education field 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. The DETC has been fortunate in being able to attract and retain for the maximum allowable terms exceptionally well-qualified individuals as Public Commissioners over the years.

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 trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with DETC; 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 Commission Chair.

For the academic and professional qualifications, and employment and organizational affiliations of the Commissioners and Staff, please visit the web site at [www.detc.org](http://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
- David W. Curd, President, Harrison Middleton 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
- Judith A. Turner, Vice President and Director of Education, Art Instruction Schools
- Carol S. Osborn, Deputy Director, DANTES (retired)\*

\*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, training for members of the Examining Committees, 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

## Powers and Responsibilities of the Commission

The powers and responsibilities of the Commission are to:

- establish and promulgate 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 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 web site) and maintain a web site 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 is the accreditation of institutions offering programs primarily by the distance education method up through the professional doctorate 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 provider 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 the institutions, 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) transmits to students organized instructional materials; (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 **under the present ownership**.
- 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, 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 protecting 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.

The Commission may not accept an application from an institution, if the institution is unable to show, as a threshold matter, that it can meet DETC's standards concerning the qualifications of the institution's owners, governing board members and administrators under Standard VI.A. or financial responsibility under Standard IX. In the event the Accrediting Commission does not accept an application for one or both of these reasons, the decision would be appealable pursuant to D.2 Appealing Commission's Adverse Decision.

In addition, the Commission reserves the right to not accept an application from an institution, otherwise qualified, if travel conditions or security concerns in that country are perceived by the Commission to be unsafe. This decision would not be appealable under DETC's D.2. Appealing Commission's Adverse Decision.

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.

### **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, using B.2. Guide to Self-Evaluation Report for 5-Year Review, be submitted and an examining committee visit 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 that curricula reviews will not be required. The Commission retains the right to make exceptions to this Policy.

### **Communicating with the Commission**

Individuals seeking further information about the Accrediting Commission, you 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
- by fax at (202) 332-1386
- by e-mail at [nan@detc.org](mailto:nan@detc.org)
- by viewing DETC's home page at "<http://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.