



ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

POLICIES, PROCEDURES,
STANDARDS AND GUIDES
OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION
ACCREDITING COMMISSION

APRIL 5, 2022

DEAC Accreditation Handbook

Copyright ©2022 by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission.
All rights reserved.

Published by the: Distance Education Accrediting Commission
1101 17th Street, NW, Suite 808
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 234-5100
www.deac.org

First Edition: January 1990
31st Edition: April 5, 2022

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is listed by the United States Department of Education as a recognized institutional accrediting agency for distance education. The DEAC is also recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The U.S. Department of Education and CHEA recognition is for postsecondary educational institutions only.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION	4
PURPOSE OF THE ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK.....	4
ABOUT DEAC.....	4
WHAT IS DISTANCE EDUCATION?	5
WHY BECOME ACCREDITED?.....	6
WHAT IS DEAC ACCREDITATION AND WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?	7
FOR STUDENTS, DEAC ACCREDITATION... ..	7
FOR INSTITUTIONS, DEAC ACCREDITATION.....	7
FOR THE PUBLIC, DEAC ACCREDITATION... ..	8
FOR GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS, DEAC ACCREDITATION... ..	8
DEAC TODAY	8
RECOGNITION BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	9
RECOGNITION BY THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA)	9
 PART TWO: PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES.....	 10
INTRODUCTION	10
I. ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR FIRST-TIME APPLICANTS; INITIAL TRAINING	12
II. ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR APPLICANTS FOR RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION.....	13
III. APPLICATION FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION OR ACCREDITATION RENEWAL; DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY	13
IV. SELF-EVALUATION AND READINESS ASSESSMENT (FIRST TIME APPLICANTS ONLY)	16
V. FULL ACCREDITATION EVALUATION PROCESS.....	18
VI. PETITIONS AND WAIVERS.....	21
VII. CONSIDERATION OF THIRD-PARTY INFORMATION.....	22
VIII. ON-SITE EVALUATION.....	23
IX. COMMISSION ACTIONS ON INITIAL AND RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION	24
X. ACTIONS AVAILABLE TO COMMISSION DURING AN ACCREDITATION TERM	29
XI. DEFINITIONS RELATING TO COMMISSION ACTIONS	31
XII. APPEALING A COMMISSION’S ADVERSE DECISION	32
XIII. BINDING ARBITRATION	36
XIV. RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY	37
XV. NOTIFICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING BY DEAC	39
XVI. PUBLIC DISCLOSURES BY INSTITUTION	42
XVII. INTERIM MONITORING OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS.....	43
XVIII. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES.....	47
XIX. PROCESS WITH RESPECT TO EACH SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE	50
XX. NON-SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES	68
XXI. TEACH-OUT PLANS.....	72
XXII. COMPLAINTS (ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS, ACTIVE APPLICANTS, AND DEAC).....	76
XXIII. REVIEWING, ADOPTING AND CIRCULATING CHANGES TO THE ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK.....	82
 PART THREE: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS	 86
I. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION.....	87
II. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING	88
III. PROGRAM OUTCOMES, CURRICULA, AND MATERIALS	86
IV. EDUCATIONAL AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES.....	95
V. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SATISFACTION	98
VI. ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS	99
VII. ADVERTISING, PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE, AND RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL	102

VIII. ADMISSION PRACTICES AND ENROLLMENT AGREEMENTS	105
IX. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES, CANCELLATIONS, AND REFUND POLICIES	110
X. INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE	114
XI. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	116
XII. FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, RECORD PROTECTION AND RETENTION	118
PART FOUR: APPENDICES	120
I. CONFLICT OF INTEREST.....	121
II. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE FORM	124
III. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ON-SITE EVALUATORS	126
IV. SELECTING AND TRAINING COMMISSIONERS	128
V. SELECTING AND TRAINING EVALUATORS.....	132
VI. SELECTING AND TRAINING APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS	137
VII. OBLIGATIONS OF ACCREDITATION.....	140
VIII. DEAC CODE OF ETHICS FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL	142
IX. ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT	144
X. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BENCHMARKS	146
XI. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SATISFACTION	147
XII. PILOT PROGRAMS	150
XIII. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WARRANT WAIVERS OF DEAC STANDARDS & PROCEDURES	152
XIII. GLOSSARY.....	153

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

DEAC has prepared this *Accreditation Handbook* to assist institutions in understanding and preparing for evaluation by DEAC. The *Accreditation Handbook* is composed of Four Parts. Part One provides an introduction to the concept of accreditation, the history and current mission of DEAC, and the value of DEAC accreditation to educational institutions, students, and the public. Part Two sets forth the primary procedures and policies which govern the DEAC accreditation process. Part Three sets forth DEAC's twelve accreditation standards. Institutions must comply in full with each of these standards in order to earn accreditation from DEAC. Part Four includes certain specific forms and policies. Additional forms and policies which may be referenced in this *Accreditation Handbook* can be found on DEAC's website (www.deac.org) or by request from DEAC. Please note: Institutions should always check the website for the most up-to-date versions of these documents.

Institutions interested in pursuing DEAC accreditation should use this *Accreditation Handbook* 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 DEAC. The *Accreditation Handbook* also offers guidance to newly established distance education institutions seeking to build or refine their policies and practices, whether or not they apply for DEAC accreditation.

ABOUT DEAC

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 standards and procedures to measure educational quality. From its inception, accreditation has been a nongovernmental, completely voluntary, peer group method of identifying educational institutions or programs that meet published standards of quality. A variety of regional, national, and professional accrediting organizations came into being in the early 1900s in response to the public's demand for reliable indicators of institutional quality.

The federally recognized accrediting organization now known as Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) has its roots in a non-profit organization of distance learning institutions founded in 1926 under the name "National Home Study Council" (NHSC) to promote education quality and ethical business practices for correspondence education programs. In 1955, NHSC established a standing committee, known as the Accrediting Commission, consisting of representatives from its member organizations, to create and implement written accreditation standards and procedures to examine and approve distance learning institutions. In 1959, DEAC received its first grant of federal recognition and was listed by the U.S. Commissioner (now Secretary) of Education as a recognized accreditor. In 1994, the National Home Study Council changed its name to the Distance Education and Training Council reflecting the expansion and increasing diversity of distance learning programs. In 2015, the organization's name was

rebranded as the Distance Education Accrediting Commission to reflect its primary function as an independent accrediting organization.

DEAC's Board of Directors, in addition to providing its traditional role of overseeing the business and corporate governance of DEAC, also serves as DEAC's accrediting commission (the "Commission"). In that capacity, it is responsible for making final decisions as to whether an institution should be granted accreditation or reaccreditation or should have its accreditation withdrawn. The Commission is also responsible for making all material decisions relating to an institution's accreditation, including, by way of example, (i) the implementation of enforcement actions with respect to institutions which appear to have fallen out of compliance with DEAC standards, and (ii) the approval or withholding of approval of substantive changes which may be requested by an institution. It applies its standards and policies in a manner that respects the mission of an institution, including those with faith-based or religious missions, to ensure and advance the aim of institutional improvement and effectiveness. The vision and mission of the DEAC are as follows:

VISION

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is the preeminent accrediting organization for distance education delivered worldwide that sets high standards for academic quality, inspiring excellence in teaching, learning, and student outcomes through voluntary assessment and peer review.

MISSION

Assuring students high quality distance education through accreditation, peer review, and institutional improvement.

WHAT IS DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Distance education, also known as online education, correspondence education, or Internet-based learning, is designed for learners who live at a distance from residential educational providers and/or institutions. Distance education has evolved in recent years to include an increasing number of adult learners who may be within reasonable proximity to a residential campus, but because of work and personal responsibilities, are unable to regularly attend a physical campus. Additionally, these adult learners consider themselves to be self-starters and more independent students who thrive in an environment that provides a balance between flexibility and structure.

Distance education has a rich history dating back to the early 18th century when its predominant medium of instruction was printed materials that were mailed to individual students and allowed for little to no interaction with faculty members. Distance education today has taken advantage of technological innovations and has become a multi-faceted avenue for providing instruction through various mediums to meet the learning needs of a diverse, growing student population. Educational institutions can reach across borders and extend globally to build strong learner communities through the use of technological tools such as social media outlets, podcasts, various forms of asynchronous and synchronous communication, and videoconferencing.

Advancements within the field of distance education have provided an increasing population of students the opportunity to earn degrees and gain knowledge and skills in various subject areas.

For institutions participating in Federal Student Assistance programs, the U.S. Department of Education defines distance education as education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors, and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include —

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conferencing; or
4. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition.

For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by the institution's accrediting agency.

Based on this definition by the U.S. Department of Education, institutions that deliver instruction through correspondence education are not eligible to participate in federal student aid.

Correspondence education, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, “means:

- 1) 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 instructor;
- 2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student;
- 3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and
- 4) Correspondence education is not distance education.”

DEAC limits eligibility to participate in Federal Student Assistance programs to institutions that demonstrate substantive interaction between the students and instructor/faculty. DEAC's scope of accreditation extends to both distance education and correspondence education institutions.

For the purposes of the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*, the term “distance education” is used throughout, whether the instructional model is correspondence, online, or direct assessment.

WHY BECOME ACCREDITED?

Accreditation communicates quality to students, institutions, the public, government, and other industry professionals. Accreditation provides assurances that a program has met established standards necessary to produce graduates who have achieved stated learning outcomes and are ready to enter the global marketplace. Students who graduate from accredited institutions have greater opportunities for employment, continued education, and mobility.

Generally, accreditation in other countries is controlled by the government and is often required. By contrast, accreditation in the United States is a voluntary, peer review process and is carried out by nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations. The peer review process allows institutions to be evaluated by other education professionals working in the industry who understand the needs and demands from a shared perspective. Additionally, the peer-review process provides checks and balances from within the industry to allow institutions to have an opportunity to meet students' educational goals by using a variety of resources while ensuring quality programs.

WHAT IS DEAC ACCREDITATION AND WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

DEAC's accreditation standards and accreditation evaluation and oversight process were specifically designed to meet the unique quality assurance needs of distance education institutions. The standards establish education quality expectations and assess an institution's ability to integrate technology to meet the needs of 21st century graduates and employers. DEAC standards are designed to accommodate the need for institutions to explore learning resources and student support services beyond those of traditional campus-based institutions. Additionally, DEAC accreditation recognizes that, by meeting the unique needs of the distance learning student, course and program delivery can expand an institution's reach beyond a regional focus to a national and international presence. When accredited distance education institutions are successful, students can benefit, regardless of geographic location, and can organize their studies to fit within personal life commitments.

DEAC-accredited institutions are primarily degree-granting institutions offering programs that award credentials through the doctoral level. However, they also include high school programs, career training certificate programs, and a range of educational program supporting ongoing learning. Students can choose the institutions that best meet their needs while being provided assurances that the chosen program has been required to comply with the precise and rigorous standards mandated by this *Accreditation Handbook*.

FOR STUDENTS, DEAC ACCREDITATION...

- Provides students with confidence that the institution offering programs ranging from high school through the professional doctoral degree and non-degree certificates has been evaluated and meets rigorous standards established by education industry professionals.
- Increases and enhances employment opportunities for students who graduate from an accredited institution. Graduates want assurances that, upon completion of the program, they have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet their educational goals.
- Verifies that the unique methods for delivering curricula are consistent with educational best practices and provides students with assurances that the education they are paying for is valuable and worth their time, money, and effort.
- Allows institutions to prepare students, by supporting their achievement of knowledge, skills, and abilities, to be productive individuals who contribute to their community and continue lifelong learning.

FOR INSTITUTIONS, DEAC ACCREDITATION...

- Allows an institution to receive public recognition for the quality programs and services

offered to students.

- Promotes the integration and continuous improvement of “best practices” in support of student achievement and institutional growth.
- Documents that an institution is true to its mission, goals, and objectives by measuring the achievement of each for purposes of continuous self-assessment.
- Allows institutions to be eligible for and apply for various professional and programmatic accreditations.
- Allows institutions the option of participating in Federal Student Assistance and military programs to benefit students in need of financial assistance to realize their educational goals.
- Allows institutions to apply for approval in some states that only allow accredited institutions.

FOR THE PUBLIC, DEAC ACCREDITATION...

- Provides a consistent and reliable indicator that institutions meet standards of quality and provides validation of credibility through a structured peer review process.
- Promotes accountability to other member institutions and various stakeholders.
- Supports and encourages the innovation and use of technology by emphasizing continuous improvement processes to ensure that institutions and graduates can compete in a global economy.

FOR GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS, DEAC ACCREDITATION...

- Provides an opportunity for industry professionals to offer input and observations that reflect current and future employment needs in a changing global economy.
- Demonstrates to various federal and state regulators that accredited institutions are leaders in the field of distance education and strive to prepare a workforce equipped to contribute to the changing economic landscape.
- Provides the opportunity for member institutions to lead the change necessary in the field of education by offering students the chance to increase their knowledge and skills while meeting their personal and professional responsibilities.

DEAC TODAY

The DEAC is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as an institutional accrediting organization for postsecondary distance education institutions that offer programs primarily by the distance education method at the levels of non-degree, high school, postsecondary, and higher education, including the professional doctoral degree.

DEAC’s goals are to assure a high standard of educational quality in the distance education institutions it accredits by requiring compliance with its published standards and procedures and by fostering continual self-improvement. DEAC is dedicated to ensuring a quality education for more than two million students who annually study at its accredited institutions.

RECOGNITION BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DEAC initially received federal recognition in 1959 and has continually held recognition by the United States Department of Education ever since. Federal recognition aims to ensure that accreditors meet expectations for institutional and program participation in federal activities, such as federal financial aid programs. Currently, the federal recognition process is largely carried out by the National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI). The NACIQI provides recommendations to the United States Secretary of Education concerning whether accreditation standards are sufficiently rigorous and effective toward ensuring that a recognized accreditor is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education provided by the institutions it accredits. In 2022, NACIQI recommended to the Secretary of Education that DEAC receive recognition through 2027. DEAC's scope of recognition by the Secretary of Education is:

The accreditation of postsecondary institutions in the United States that offer degree and/or non-degree programs primarily by the distance or correspondence education method, including through direct assessment, up to and including the professional doctoral degree, including those institutions that are specifically certified by the agency as accredited for Federal Student Assistance program purposes.

RECOGNITION BY THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA)

CHEA was formed in 1996 by presidents of United States colleges and universities to demonstrate higher education quality through strengthened accreditation processes. It promotes academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and works to advance self-regulation in higher education through accreditation. Recognition by CHEA affirms that the standards and procedures of accrediting organizations meet the academic quality, institutional improvement, and accountability expectations CHEA has established. DEAC first received recognition by CHEA in 2001. It received its most recent grant of recognition from CHEA in 2013 through 2023. DEAC's scope of recognition by CHEA is:

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 percent or more) and award credentials at the associate, baccalaureate, master's, first professional and professional doctoral degree level.

PART TWO: PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

Part Two of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) *Accreditation Handbook* is intended to set forth the procedural framework that institutions seeking accreditation from DEAC are required to follow. It also includes a description of the primary documents and information an institution will be expected to submit in order to demonstrate compliance with DEAC accreditation standards (found in Part Three of the DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). Please note that, although the process of evaluation for accreditation is comprehensive and thorough for both initial applicants and those institutions seeking a renewal of their accreditation, the process for a new applicant includes additional steps and requirements, including an initial assessment of “readiness.”

Part Two also sets forth (1) the supplemental process required for institutions seeking to be certified by DEAC as eligible to participate in Title IV programs and (2) the primary forms of interim monitoring that DEAC has established to ensure and support ongoing compliance with its accreditation standards.

Unless otherwise indicated below, all applicable forms and fees associated with the accreditation process, including those involved in mid-term monitoring of accredited institutions and/or supplemental processes such as an application for Title IV eligibility certification, can be found on DEAC’s website.

Application for accreditation, reaccreditation, or Title IV eligibility certification is wholly voluntary. For institutions who elect to proceed along any of these paths, DEAC offers training and detailed written guidance. DEAC staff also welcome questions from institutions on the process, procedures, and forms at any time

Five Important Notes on DEAC’s Accreditation Processes and Procedures

1. **The decisions to apply for accreditation and to continue through the accreditation process are voluntary.** Applicant institutions for initial accreditation or reaccreditation may at any time drop out of the accreditation process, subject to their continuing obligation for the payment of any required fees and already incurred expenses.
2. **Scope of Accreditation.** DEAC only awards accreditation status for institutions. DEAC does not offer pre-accreditation or similar status nor does DEAC accredit institutions on a “partial” basis. Accredited institutions may offer distance education services that are not part of the institution’s accredited degree or non-degree program curriculum. These could include, by way of example, continuing education courses, professional development courses, and courses offered in partnership with individual businesses. However, any distance education offerings of this nature must be clearly designated as outside of the scope of accreditation granted by DEAC both on the institution’s website and in the

description of the distance education being offered.

3. **Procedural Safeguards and Due Process.** As referenced in Part One of the *Handbook*, peer review lies at the core of the accreditation process for institutions of higher education in the United States. At the same time, DEAC shares with other accrediting organizations and educational regulators the recognition that peer review by its nature is susceptible to subjectivity, potential conflicts of interest, and human error or bias. The accreditation processes and procedures developed by DEAC have been carefully designed to safeguard the integrity and quality of institutional and program reviews by incorporating four primary features: (a) transparency in requirements, standards, and findings; (b) multiple layers of review by different evaluators; (c) extensive safeguards against conflicts of interest (further information on the same can be found in Part Four of the *Handbook*); and (d) mechanisms for due process afforded throughout the process.

With respect to due process in particular, applicant institutions being evaluated for accreditation can, for example, (a) respond in writing and with documentation to findings of DEAC's subject matter specialists and on-site evaluation team, (b) submit objections to the selection of on-site evaluation team members, (c) request a new evaluation or curriculum review, (d) demonstrate why a show cause directive should be lifted, and (e) appeal a DEAC decision to deny or withdraw accreditation, or deny approval of a substantive change (as defined in Section XVIII below) to an independent appeals panel (see Section XII below). Once accredited, member institutions have the opportunity to review and comment on material substantive changes to DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures.

The right of due process does not mean that the DEAC will agree with or accept an institution's response or recommendations. In addition, the burden of proof in demonstrating compliance with the standards rests with the institution at each stage of DEAC's evaluation and decision process and through any appellate process exercised by an institution. However, an institution's right to respond and be heard at key junctures in the evaluation process, as well as the institution's right to appeal the Commission's initiation of an adverse actions (defined in Section XI.A below) and denial of substantive changes, are central to the accreditation process.

4. **Meeting or Exceeding Government Standards and Educational Quality Leaders.** As referenced in Part One of this *Handbook*, the accreditation standards, processes, and procedures set forth in Parts Two and Three of DEAC's *Accreditation Handbook* are in many instances required or directed by federal regulation or by other recognition or oversight organizations to which DEAC belongs or voluntarily submits, such as the Council For Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). When regulations across these organizations conflict in the extent of their requirements, DEAC adheres to the more rigorous standards.

In addition, in certain areas, DEAC of its own accord, after review and comment by its members, has elected to implement disclosure and reporting requirements that exceed those required by government regulations or those required by other accrediting

organizations. This is particularly the case when DEAC believes that higher levels of transparency benefit the public generally and, more particularly, enrolled and prospective students of DEAC-accredited institutions/programs.

5. Acceptance of DEAC Bylaws and Published Policies, Procedures and Standards

Institutions that elect to seek accreditation from DEAC or have been accredited by DEAC must agree in writing to be bound by and comply with the terms of DEAC's corporate by-laws and its published policies, standards, and procedures, including those set forth in the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*.

I. ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR FIRST-TIME APPLICANTS; INITIAL TRAINING

The process for institutions seeking DEAC accreditation for the first time for their institution occurs in four steps: preparing for accreditation, demonstration of eligibility, self-evaluation and readiness assessment, and full evaluation for accreditation. Of these, the third and fourth steps consist of formal evaluations, with the fourth comprising the most rigorous and comprehensive evaluation of the institution. In the fourth step, a first-time applicant institution is also entitled to the rights of due process afforded to accredited institutions seeking reaccreditation. Successful completion of any one step is required before an institution can proceed to the next step; however, successful completion of a prior step does not guarantee successful completion of any subsequent step. Applying for accreditation or reaccreditation is a voluntary process. Accordingly, an institution may at any time during its pursuit of accreditation decide to withdraw from the process and end its application.

DEAC reserves the right to limit its accreditation process to the kinds of distance education institutions and types of distance programs that are within its scope of expertise and to decline to consider institutions and programs for accreditation that are outside DEAC's scope or competence or where other circumstances do not permit a meaningful evaluation. The institution assumes the burden of proof in demonstrating that its curricula, operating structure, and method of delivery are within DEAC's recognized scope of authority.

- A. Step One: Preparing for Accreditation. A key person at the institution who will be leading or central to the accreditation application process must enroll in and successfully complete the *Preparing for DEAC Accreditation* tutorial to qualify as a compliance officer. The course is available through the Online Training Center on DEAC's website at www.deac.org. This tutorial must be completed within one year prior to submitting the application for accreditation. DEAC does not accept applications for accreditation without a copy of the Certificate of Completion for the tutorial from the key person who completed the course.
- B. No Promotional Use of DEAC's Accreditation Process. An initial applicant institution may not suggest that it is accredited by or will be accredited by or otherwise carries any form of approval by DEAC unless and until accreditation has been finally granted, and then solely in accordance with the rules for referencing DEAC accreditation set forth in Standard VII.B. Without limiting the foregoing, when an institution applies for initial accreditation, it must certify on its application for accreditation that it "agrees to not make any promotional use of its application for accreditation status prior to receiving

DEAC accreditation.” If DEAC is informed that an applicant institution has violated the foregoing prohibition, the DEAC executive director will notify the institution immediately and tell them to cease and desist. If the institution continues in the unauthorized disclosure, its application for accreditation will be terminated, and the institution will not be allowed to reapply for accreditation for one year.

II. ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR APPLICANTS FOR RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

Institutions applying to DEAC for renewal of their accreditation must also complete the accreditation training tutorial available through the Online Training Center on DEAC’s website at www.deac.org and submit an application for accreditation and nonrefundable application fee pursuant to the terms set forth in Section III below. However, they are not required to undergo a readiness assessment but rather, upon written confirmation from DEAC that their application has been accepted, proceed directly with a full accreditation evaluation, including a curriculum review, pursuant to the terms set forth in Section V below.

III. APPLICATION FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION OR ACCREDITATION RENEWAL; DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

After completing the *Preparing for DEAC Accreditation* online tutorial, an institution seeking DEAC accreditation or reaccreditation must submit an application for accreditation and associated nonrefundable fee (see DEAC website for the fee schedule and application form). The application requires information intended to establish the applicant’s eligibility (or continued eligibility in the case of institutions applying for reaccreditation) based on the standards of eligibility set forth below. DEAC makes its determination of eligibility based primarily on an institution’s application but may also request and review additional information from the applicant and/or third parties in order to reach its determination. The burden of proving eligibility is on the applicant institution. Compliance with the eligibility criteria must be maintained throughout the accreditation evaluation process and any subsequent term of accreditation.

A determination of an applicant’s eligibility by DEAC is communicated by a letter, delivered within 30 days of DEAC’s receipt of the application. That letter marks the start of the formal evaluation of an applicant institution for accreditation. If an initial applicant institution is determined to be ineligible, DEAC will communicate this decision within the same time frame and will provide the basis for its decision. Institutions whose applications have not been accepted may reapply only after they have resolved the disqualifying issue(s) to the satisfaction of DEAC. If an applicant for reaccreditation is determined to be ineligible, the Commission will initiate an inquiry into the noncompliance and, when appropriate, will issue a show cause directive or take other action pursuant to the terms of Section XVII (Interim Monitoring). Institutions that elect to proceed with their application for accreditation must complete all steps of the accreditation process within 12 to 18 months after the determination of eligibility is communicated by DEAC.

The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- A. A distance education institution or provider is defined by DEAC as an educational institution or organization whose primary purpose is providing education or training that:
1. formally enrolls students and maintains student records;
 2. retains qualified faculty to service students;
 3. provides educationally sound and up-to-date curricula that are supported by quality instructional materials and appropriate technology; and
 4. provides continuous two-way communication on student work, e.g., evaluating students' examinations, projects, and/or answering queries, with timely feedback given to students.

Furthermore,

5. each program offered by the institution is predominantly distance education or correspondence education (51 percent or more);
 6. the institution offers non-degree and/or degree programs up to the professional doctoral level pursuant to DEAC's scope of recognition; and
 7. the institution uses the term "college" or "university" in its name only if it offers academic degree programs.
- B. The institution is properly licensed, authorized, exempted, or approved by all applicable state education institutional authorities (or their equivalent for non-U.S. institutions). The institution is in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements. Exemptions from state law must be supported by state-issued documentation or by express statutory/regulatory language. Proper state authorization in an institution's state of domicile is a prerequisite for DEAC accreditation and is required to maintain accredited status. Accordingly, should an institution lose its state licensure in its state of domicile for any reason while applying for initial accreditation or reaccreditation, that process is automatically terminated. In any such situation, the institution shall not be entitled to receive any refund of fees already paid to DEAC nor shall DEAC have any liability to the institution associated with the termination of the application/evaluation process. DEAC accreditation of an accredited institution is also automatically withdrawn as of the date of the loss of state licensure. Such a withdrawal of accreditation may be appealed by an institution pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section XII below.
- C. At the time of the initial application, the institution has been enrolling students in the current programs for 12 consecutive months. The institution may not add new programs during this 12-month period or during the initial accreditation process. In its response to this criterion, the institution must submit a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the names, mailing addresses, and email addresses of no more than the first 100 students consecutively enrolled within each division and degree level of the institution, beginning the first day of the twelfth month preceding the date of this application. If the institution has less than 100 students, it should submit the information for all students enrolled. Only institutions that are 100 percent correspondence may submit the names and addresses of students on self-adhesive mailing labels.

- D. At the time of initial application, the institution has been operating under the current legal status, form of control, and ownership for two consecutive years. The institution may not undergo changes in current legal status, form of control, or ownership during the initial accreditation process.
- E. The institution has clearly articulated outcomes for its educational offerings and has an ongoing outcomes assessment program in place designed to measure student achievement and satisfaction.
- F. The institution maintains a permanent physical facility that supports its educational offerings and business operations in a professional setting. The facility is maintained at a fixed geographic location that is appropriately licensed or authorized, as required by local and state regulatory authorities. A Post Office box is not a physical facility address.
- G. The institution documents that it is financially sound and can meet its financial obligations to provide instruction and service to its students by submitting financial statements in accordance with Part Three, Section XI, Financial Responsibility, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*.
- H. The institution demonstrates that its name is free from any association with any activity that could damage the standing of DEAC or of the accrediting process, such as illegal actions, unethical conduct, or abuse of consumers.
- I. The institution and 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, governing board members, officials, and administrators have records free from any association with any malfeasance, including, but not limited to, owning, managing, or controlling any educational institutions that have entered bankruptcy or have closed, to the detriment of the students. Ongoing state, federal or local indictments, enforcement activities, or other censure against an institution, an institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators must be promptly disclosed by an institution to DEAC regardless of whether initiated before or during the period in which an institution is applying for accreditation or reaccreditation and during any period during which an institution is accredited by DEAC (Standard X.B). The notice should include an explanation from the institution as to the circumstances giving rise to the governmental action and why the governmental action should not result in a declaration of ineligibility under this section and/or a violation of Standard X. Upon receipt of the notice, the Commission may, in its sole discretion, initiate investigative proceedings and/or make a determination that the governmental action places the institution in violation of this eligibility criterion and of Standard X.
- J. The institution agrees that, as part of the application process, its owners, officers, and managers may be subject to a background check by DEAC, which may include, but not be limited to, DEAC surveys of state educational oversight agencies, federal departments and agencies, and consumer protection agencies; and checks on their 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.

- K. An initial applicant, and its corporate affiliates, must be free from any pending or final action brought by a state agency or recognized accrediting agency to (1) suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate any one or more of such entities' legal authority to operate or (2) deny accreditation or renewal of accreditation to one or more of such entities. An applicant for reaccreditation and its corporate affiliates must be free from any such final action by a state agency or recognized accrediting agency.

IV. SELF-EVALUATION AND READINESS ASSESSMENT (FIRST TIME APPLICANTS ONLY)

For initial applicants, the next step after receipt of DEAC's application acceptance letter is a readiness assessment conducted by an independent DEAC-appointed evaluator. The readiness assessment provides a preliminary evaluation of the institution. It is not a comprehensive examination nor should a finding of "ready" by the evaluator be construed as an indication that an institution is likely to be granted accreditation if it proceeds with the more extensive accreditation evaluation. Rather, it is intended to determine whether or not the institution has sufficient strength and stability to successfully undergo a full evaluation, and therefore whether a commitment of the institution's and DEAC's resources in administering such an evaluation is merited. The assessment also provides guidance to the institution on the actions necessary for the institution to prepare for the more in-depth, rigorous, and comprehensive review. **A determination of Not-Ready by an independent evaluator or the on-site team is final and not subject to appeal or to review by the Commission.**

The first step in the readiness assessment is the submission by the applicant institution of a completed Self-Evaluation Report (including its exhibits, "SER"), together with the nonrefundable readiness assessment fee (see DEAC website for the fee schedule) within 60 days of the date when DEAC accepted the institution's application for accreditation. Institutions should submit the required materials in accordance with DEAC's instructions for electronic submission.

- A. Preparation of SER: The SER is prepared by the institution's compliance officer and staff in accordance with the terms of the SER form and the DEAC guidance provided in its *Guide to Self-Evaluation*. Both the SER and the SER Guide can be downloaded from DEAC's website. The SER is an extensive, demanding, and comprehensive report and provides data on all areas of an institution's operations and performance, including its compliance with all DEAC accreditation standards. An institution's preparation and submission of an SER is intended both to demonstrate an institution's compliance with DEAC's accreditation standards (see Part Three of the *Accreditation Handbook*) and to provide the institution with a useful tool of self-assessment.

Readiness Evaluation: Following receipt of the applicant's SER, DEAC's independent evaluator reviews the SER and exhibits to determine whether or not the institution is likely to be able to successfully complete a full accreditation evaluation. For purposes of achieving a positive result on the readiness assessment, an institution is not required to demonstrate 100 percent compliance with all accreditation standards (Part Three, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). However, 100 percent compliance is required in order to be awarded accreditation. The DEAC evaluator's feedback on an applicant's SER is intended to help the applicant and DEAC assess where the institution is, in terms of qualifying for accreditation, how much additional work may be required for the institution to achieve 100 percent compliance, whether the institution has the capacity to comply with the accreditation standards on an ongoing basis, and whether or not it is advisable for DEAC and/or the institution to invest their respective resources in the next, more rigorous stage of evaluation.

- B. The Readiness Assessment Report is returned to the institution within 10-12 weeks following DEAC's receipt of the institution's SER. The institution is either "Deemed Ready" or "Deemed Not Ready".
- **Deemed Ready:** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating that it is deemed ready to continue the accreditation process. The letter also provides guidance to the institution on where its operations and SER responses need to be strengthened, expanded, or revised in order to increase the likelihood of a successful accreditation evaluation and on-site visit. The letter contains an overview of the accreditation process, provides information on next steps, and indicates that the DEAC director of accreditation will coordinate with the institution to schedule the dates for the on-site evaluation. Institutions that receive a Deemed Ready letter must submit their curricula for review within three months of receipt of the letter (see Section V below). The institution must also submit its revised SER to the on-site evaluation team at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit.
 - **Deemed Not Ready (Second Submission):** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating that it is not deemed ready to continue the accreditation process. The institution has six months to submit a revised SER incorporating the evaluator's comments and recommendations, together with a nonrefundable second submission readiness fee (see DEAC website for fee schedule). If, based on the revised SER, the independent DEAC-appointed evaluator deems the institution ready to continue the accreditation process, the institution will begin the curricular review process required for the full evaluation by submitting its curricula for review within three months. The institution must also submit a revised SER to the on-site evaluation team at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit.
 - **Deemed Not Ready (Third Submission):** If the institution is not deemed ready after the second submission, the institution has another six months to revise and submit a new SER incorporating the evaluator's comments and recommendations. The third submission is reviewed and evaluated by an independent readiness assessment

evaluation team appointed by DEAC, which makes its readiness assessment based on the revised SER and the results of the virtual readiness assessment visit. A determination by the team that the institution is not ready is final; however, the institution can reapply for initial accreditation after one year. The third submission must be accompanied by the nonrefundable applicable virtual visit fee (see DEAC website for fee schedule).

V. FULL ACCREDITATION EVALUATION PROCESS

A full accreditation evaluation and review is required of both new applicants for accreditation and institutions seeking renewal of their accreditation. The process begins in two parallel paths: (1) the curriculum review and (2) the institution's preparation and submission of its SER. It is the responsibility of the institution to initiate both processes.

A. CURRICULAR REVIEW

As a part of the accreditation process, DEAC engages subject matter specialists to conduct comprehensive evaluations of course/program materials. The subject matter specialist is responsible for ascertaining whether the curricula and materials offered by the distance education institution are complete, accurate, and up to date in relation to stated educational outcomes. While only representative courses are reviewed in depth, the subsequent on-site review includes the scope and sequence of all curricula. Course materials submitted as part of an institution's application for accreditation are not returned to the institution. The institution is invoiced per subject matter specialist for each course/program review. Curricular reviews associated with full accreditation evaluations typically take between three and six months.

Curricular reviews may also occur in the context of a substantive change request (see Section XVIII for definition). For substantive change applications, the curricular review may take up to six months. This includes the search for a subject specialist as well as the review by the subject matter specialist.

B. CURRICULAR REVIEW FOR INSTITUTIONS SEEKING INITIAL ACCREDITATION

1. DEGREE PROGRAMS

- a. Once the institution is deemed "ready" to move ahead in the accreditation process, it submits a list of all programs offered at the institution. DEAC then selects a sample of courses required for review and sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission and the fee.
- b. For each degree program offered, DEAC selects 50 percent of the courses for review. The representative courses are selected based on a broad and fair representation of the curriculum for each degree program.
- c. The institution submits an educational offerings report and curriculum materials for each program, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

2. NON-DEGREE PROGRAMS

- a. Once the institution is deemed “ready” to move ahead in the accreditation process, it submits a list of all programs offered at the institution. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site subject specialist review fee.
- b. The institution submits an educational offerings report and the curriculum materials, including supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

3. HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- a. Once a high school diploma-awarding institution is deemed “ready” to move ahead in the accreditation process, it submits a list of the courses offered at the institution. DEAC reviews the list and selects the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. For each high school program offered, 50 percent of the courses are selected for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criterion:
 - Broadly and fairly representative of the following subject areas: mathematics, English, science, social studies, and electives.
- c. The institution submits an educational offerings report and the curriculum materials, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

4. RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT SPECIALIST REVIEW

All institutions that undergo the curricular review process for initial accreditation must respond to any “Partially Meets” or “Does Not Meet” findings at least two weeks prior to the on-site evaluation. The institutional response is sent to DEAC and is shared with the DEAC on-site evaluation team.

C. CURRICULAR REVIEW FOR INSTITUTIONS SEEKING RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

1. DEGREE PROGRAMS

- a. An institution undergoing renewal of accreditation submits a list of all degree programs offered at the institution. DEAC reviews the list and selects the programs and courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the programs and courses required for submission. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site subject specialist review fee.
- b. The representative programs and courses are selected based on the following criteria:

- If one program is offered, DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the institution's courses for review. The selection will include the final or capstone course.
 - If between two and 10 programs are offered, the institution will submit 50 percent of the programs, and DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the institution's courses for review. The selection will include the capstone/final program course.
 - If more than 11 programs are offered, the institution will submit seven programs or approximately 25 percent of the programs (whichever is greater), and DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the institution's courses for review. The selection will include the capstone/final program course.
- c. The institution submits an educational offerings report and curriculum materials, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review by off-site subject specialists.

2. NON-DEGREE PROGRAMS

- a. An institution undergoing renewal of accreditation submits a list of all programs offered at the institution. DEAC reviews the application and sends the institution a letter indicating the programs required for submission and the fee.
- b. The representative educational offerings are selected based on the following criterion:
- Approximately 25 percent of all educational offerings that are broadly representative.
- c. The institution submits an educational offerings report and the curriculum materials for each selected educational offering, including supporting documentation, for review off-site by subject specialists.

3. HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- a. An institution undergoing renewal of accreditation submits a list of all high school programs offered at the institution. DEAC reviews the application and selects the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission and the fee.
- b. For each high school program offered, DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the courses for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criterion:

- Broadly and fairly representative of the following subject areas: mathematics, English, science, social studies, and electives.

- c. The institution submits an educational offerings report and the curriculum materials, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

4. RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT SPECIALIST REVIEW

The institution responds to any “Partially Meets” or “Does Not Meet” findings at least two weeks prior to the on-site evaluation. The response is sent to DEAC and shared with the DEAC on-site evaluation team-

D. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT FOR FULL ACCREDITATION EVALUATION

All applicants for accreditation must submit a completed SER as part of the evaluation process. For institutions applying for accreditation for the first time, the SER is typically a revision of the SER submitted in connection with the readiness assessment, expanded and updated based on the applicant’s experience of going through the assessment and receiving feedback from the DEAC evaluator. The SER must be submitted to DEAC at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit and is shared with the on-site evaluation team. The SER for the full evaluation follows the same form as the SER required for the readiness assessment (see Section VI.A. above and DEAC website for the SER form and Guide to Self-Evaluation). However, institutions submitting SERs in connection with the full evaluation process must demonstrate that they are in compliance with all DEAC accreditation standards (see Part Three of DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). Partial compliance is not sufficient to be awarded accreditation.

VI. PETITIONS AND WAIVERS

Whether in connection with an application for accreditation or reaccreditation, or in the context of a mid-term event, an institution may submit a petition to DEAC requesting a waiver or alternative interpretation of any DEAC accreditation standard or procedure. Such submission must be in the format specified by DEAC, document in detail the rationale for the request, and include documentation the institution wishes to present in support of its request. Petitions should not be requested simply because an institution does not like a standard or does not care to be subject to it. Petitions may only be submitted for a significant reason as it applies to the institution’s mission. Petitions must be submitted at least 45 days in advance of one of the Commission’s normally scheduled semiannual meetings for consideration at that meeting or within such alternative time period as DEAC may specify from time to time by written notice. DEAC may also allow petitions to be filed at other times upon request of an institution if the Commission determines that such accommodation is appropriate, given the specific circumstances.¹ All petitions must be accompanied by full payment of the applicable petition fee (see DEAC website for fee schedule).

¹ Refer to Appendix XIII, Part Four, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*, for further explanation of such circumstances.

- A. The Commission shall review a properly submitted petition, including its supporting documentation, and shall vote to either approve or deny the petition.
1. The Commission will grant a waiver or alternative interpretation of its standards or procedures where an institution is able to demonstrate, as determined by the Commission in its reasonable discretion, that:
 - extenuating circumstances are present that indicate that the normal application of the standard or procedure would create an undue hardship on the institution or its students, or
 - the waiver or alternative interpretation meets the underlying purpose and intent of the standard or procedure.
 2. If a petition is denied, the institution may not resubmit a petition for the same request unless a subsequent change in relevant facts and circumstances or other material development would be likely to result in a different decision by the Commission. Petitions are granted for a period of one year for initial applicants and one accreditation cycle for accredited institutions.
 3. DEAC notifies the institution in writing of its decision within 30 days following that decision. Such notice includes a summary of the rationale for the Commission's decision. A decision by the Commission not to grant a waiver or alternative interpretation is final and is not subject to appeal.

VII. CONSIDERATION OF THIRD-PARTY INFORMATION

- A. DEAC publishes notice of the institutions under review for initial or renewal of accreditation on its website and encourages interested parties to submit written comments pertaining to such review. DEAC also solicits comments from third parties, such as state educational agencies, other accrediting or licensing organizations, and other governmental or quasi-governmental entities. DEAC may also solicit comments from education-focused media, industry groups, and other relevant parties. Comments may be submitted via DEAC's website or by mail or other delivery method.
- B. DEAC requests that public and third-party comments are submitted at least 30 days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Commission at which the institution's application for accreditation or reaccreditation is to be evaluated. This timeframe allows for a reasonable period in which DEAC can share the comment with the institution and the institution can respond to the same. Comments received after the deadline will be provided to the Commission, together with such additional information relating to the comment as DEAC may have gathered. To the extent that the Commission believes that the comment raises a serious and credible concern with respect to the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards which are not addressed by the institution's SER, the Chair's Report, and the institution's response to the Chair's Report, the Commission will determine whether the issuance of a deferral notice or a show cause directive is appropriate.

- C. Any information received from the public is provided to the institution for review and response. A copy of the public comment and the institution's response to the same, if any, are included in the record to be reviewed by the Commission. Information received from government agencies or departments is treated in the same way as information obtained from nongovernmental sources unless the agency or department provides the information to DEAC with express requirements of confidentiality.
- D. With respect to applicants for reaccreditation, the Commission also takes into account actions by other accrediting organizations that have denied accreditation or renewal of accreditation status to the institution, have placed the institution on probation, or have withdrawn/revoked the accreditation or renewal of accreditation status of the institution. For initial applicants, any of the foregoing may be a barrier to establishing eligibility.

VIII. ON-SITE EVALUATION

On-site evaluations allow the on-site team to independently evaluate the information submitted in the institution's Self-Evaluation Report and gather additional facts for DEAC. All members of the on-site evaluation team are subject to DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy located in the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook Appendix*.

When appropriate or required by specific circumstances as determined by the Commission in its discretion, an "on-site" visit may be conducted virtually. The Commission may rely on virtual on-site visits and treat them as equivalent to actual on-site visits in connection with any of its decision-making processes. However, where a virtual on-site visit has replaced a scheduled actual on-site visit, the latter will be rescheduled when practicable.

- A. **Selection of On-site Team:** In selecting evaluators for on-site evaluations in the context of a full accreditation evaluation, DEAC considers the nature of the institution being reviewed, the methods of operation unique to the institution, the program(s) offered, and the expertise and past evaluation experience of the evaluator.

The number of on-site evaluators for a full accreditation evaluation on-site team is determined by the size of the institution, but the teams generally include:

- a Chair,
- an education standards evaluator,
- a business standards evaluator,
- a subject specialist for each subject area,
- a DEAC staff member, and
- state or federal agency observers (invited).

One person may serve in more than one of the above roles; however, all such roles will be represented on the on-site team. On-site teams working in other contexts, such as reviews in connection with substantive changes (see Section XVIII below) are generally smaller and tailored to the context.

- B. Once the evaluators are selected, their names are submitted to the institution. The institution may object, with an adequate reason, to a specific evaluator and request that another evaluator be chosen. DEAC considers any objections submitted by an institution but is not required to replace evaluators to whom objections have been made.
- C. **On-Site Evaluation Function and Process:** The on-site evaluation provides an opportunity for evaluators to meet with key staff members, faculty/instructors, principal managers, outside accountants, governing board members, and advisory council members in order to verify that the institution is meeting its mission, can demonstrate successful student achievement, and otherwise operates in accordance with DEAC accreditation standards. All such institutional personnel must be present or readily available by telephone or other link during the on-site visit.
1. Before the on-site evaluation, each evaluator develops a comprehensive picture of the institution's operations by completing a thorough review of the SER and then answers questions on the evaluation form provided by DEAC.
 2. The Chair of the on-site team is responsible for the completion of the on-site evaluation in accordance with DEAC's processes and procedures and ensures that each evaluator completes his/her tasks during the on-site evaluation.
 3. A DEAC staff member accompanies the on-site team throughout the on-site evaluation to ensure objectivity, impartiality, uniformity, consistency in the interpretation of standards, and adherence to established procedures and to serve as a liaison between the on-site team and the Commission.

D. Chair's Report:

The culmination of the on-site visit is the Chair's Report. This document is created by the chair of the on-site team and sets forth the team's findings on the compliance of the institution with each accreditation standard. The Chair's Report is provided to DEAC, which reviews the report for completeness and clarity before forwarding it to the institution for response, typically within six weeks following the conclusion of the on-site visit. The institution's response is due within 30 days following its receipt of the report. In its response, the institution may add new or supporting information or correct any incorrect statements made in the Chair's Report. Both the Chair's Report and the institution's response are submitted to the Commission, together with other evaluation materials, including the SER, subject matter specialist reports, and third-party comments (if any) and the institution's response to the same (if any). The Commission will review all documents prior to making a decision on the institution's application. In the event that, following the on-site visit but prior to the Commission's making its decision on the accreditation of an applicant institution, the institution undergoes a material change in its management, method of operation, enrollment, or program offerings, or has any reason to believe it is no longer in compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards, the institution must promptly notify DEAC in writing and include such details as are available so that the Commission can consider the same in the review of the institution's

application.

IX. COMMISSION ACTIONS ON INITIAL AND RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

The Commission usually meets twice a year, in January and June, to review the evaluation file for applicants for initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation. The evaluation file typically consists of the applicant's application for accreditation, the Self-Evaluation Report submitted for the full evaluation, the Chair's Report, the institution's response to the Chair's Report, subject specialists' reports and the institution's response to the same, student surveys, any complaints filed against the institution by any person or entity, any responses to public notices and requests for comments to governmental and other industry entities, any institutional response to the foregoing, substantive communications between the institution and the DEAC relating to the accreditation process, and other relevant documentation that may be submitted or created by the institution, DEAC or the public in connection with the evaluation process.

Prior to the Commission meeting at which applications for accreditation or reaccreditation are to be evaluated, each member of the Commission is required to complete and sign a Conflict of Interest form with respect to each institution to be considered at that meeting and to recuse themselves from the evaluation and decision making with respect to any institution with whom a conflict exists (see Part Four of the *Handbook* for DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and associated forms).

Notice of the Commission's decision with respect to each applicant for accreditation or reaccreditation is provided to the institution within thirty (30) days following the decision. Notice is also provided, as applicable and pursuant to the terms of Section XV, to the Secretary of Education, applicable state licensing/regulatory agencies, other accrediting/licensing organizations, and the public.

The Commission takes one of four courses of action when evaluating a candidate for accreditation or reaccreditation. It may:

- A. **Accredit** a new applicant institution for up to three years or renew an institution's accredited status for up to five years. In either case, the Commission may, in its discretion, also require that the institution submit interim reports on specific programs or services at different points during the institution's accreditation term. These reports are separate and apart from the interim annual reporting requirements of all DEAC-accredited institutions.
 - 1. If an institution complies in all material respects with DEAC's accreditation standards but the Commission has identified minor administrative or clerical deficiencies in the institution's documentation or operations that can be easily corrected by the institution and those corrections can be confirmed remotely by DEAC staff, then the Commission may vote to grant accreditation or the renewal of accreditation to such institution contingent on written confirmation of the correction(s) by DEAC's executive director. In such event, the staff will notify the institution of the deficiencies to be corrected and the deadline for making the corrections. If a

deficiency continues beyond the stated deadline, the accreditation decision with respect to such institution will be deferred until the Commission's next scheduled semiannual meeting.

B. **Defer** a decision pending the Commission's receipt of additional information requested in the deferral notice. A deferral notice is issued in order for the institution to provide additional information and/or supplement its response with respect to concerns of the Commission, in each case as set forth in the deferral notice. A deferral notice does not represent a determination of non-compliance. The maximum deferral period is 12 months from the date of the Commission's decision unless the Commission extends the period for "good cause" as defined below. In no event will the deferral period, including any good cause extensions, extend beyond the shorter of 24 months or 150 percent of the length of the institution's longest program.

1. Deferral Notice: Within 30 days following a Commission decision to defer a decision on an institution's application for accreditation or reaccreditation, DEAC will send the institution written notice of such decision (the "deferral notice"). The deferral notice will:

- a. identify the accreditation standards for which the Commission requires additional information, reports, on-site evaluations, and/or performance data in order to fully evaluate the institution's compliance;
- b. provide the time frames within which such additional requirements must be completed and a description of the additional information and materials to be provided; and
- c. inform the institution of the month in which its application for accreditation or renewal of accreditation will next be reviewed by the Commission.

The deferral notice may also require that the institution refrain from making or proposing any substantive changes (as defined in Section XVIII below) during the deferral period. However, if a substantive change is required to more effectively address a concern or question expressed in the deferral notice, the institution may request approval of such change. Any such request must provide a detailed rationale to demonstrate why the requested change would most effectively respond to the identified issue.

2. Decision Following Deferral: Upon review of an institution that has previously received a deferral notice, the Commission may:

- a. grant accreditation or renewal of accreditation if it determines that the institution's response demonstrates that the institution is compliant with the cited accreditation standards and requirements;
- b. extend the deferral period if appropriate;

- c. issue a show cause directive in accordance with the procedures set forth below; or
 - d. deny accreditation or reaccreditation as set forth below.
3. Status During Deferral Period. An accredited institution under a deferral notice will retain its accreditation status unless and until the Commission decides to deny or withdraw its accreditation, as applicable. However, notice of the deferral will be published on DEAC's website.
- C. In cases where the Commission does not believe that an institution has demonstrated compliance with accreditation standards and other requirements, the Commission will direct the institution to **Show Cause** as to why its application for accreditation or reaccreditation should not be denied.

Show Cause Directive: Within 30 days following the Commission decision, DEAC will issue a notice to the institution requiring it to show cause why its application for accreditation or reaccreditation should not be denied (the "show cause directive"). The show cause directive will:

- identify the accreditation standard(s) with which the institution has not demonstrated compliance;
- set forth the reasons why the Commission believes that the institution is not in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards;
- advise the institution of its obligations, reporting requirements, and/or required remedial action under the show cause directive and the time frames established for the same (the entire period of remediation, the "Show Cause Remediation Period"); and
- require that the institution refrain from making or proposing any substantive changes (as defined in Section XVIII below) during the Show Cause Remediation Period unless the proposed change is reasonably required to demonstrate the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. Any request for approval of such a substantive change must provide a detailed rationale to demonstrate why the requested change would most effectively respond to one or more issues identified in the show cause directive.

In certain situations, where a large number of accreditation standards may be implicated by the Commission's identified concerns or where the Commission identifies systemic problems, the show cause directive may require the institution to submit to a comprehensive re-evaluation. This may include a requirement that the institution submit an updated application for accreditation in order to update and confirm eligibility status and an updated SER, as well as a new curricular review and on-site visit.

Show Cause Remediation Period. The maximum Show Cause Remediation Period may not exceed the shorter of (a) two years, or (b) 150 percent of the length of the institution's

longest program (unless the Commission extends the period for “good cause” as defined below). The burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate, within the Show Cause Remediation Period (as that may be extended for good cause shown) and consistent with the terms of the show cause directive, that it is meeting DEAC’s accreditation standards. In no event will a Show Cause Remediation Period, including any good faith extensions which may be granted, exceed three years.

Decision Following Show Cause Remediation Period: Upon review of the application for accreditation or reaccreditation of an institution that has previously received a show cause directive, a decision is made on the institution’s compliance with the accreditation standards or requirements noted in the directive. The Commission may:

- vacate the show cause directive and either defer an accreditation decision or grant accreditation or reaccreditation if it is determined that the grant is warranted;
- continue the show cause directive and require the submission of additional information or further reports from the institution and/or a special visit in accordance with Section X.A. below; or
- deny accreditation or reaccreditation.

Status During Pendency of Show Cause Directive. An institution under a show cause directive will retain its accreditation status unless and until the Commission decides to deny or withdraw its accreditation, as applicable. However, notice of the show cause directive will be published on DEAC’s website and must be included by the institution in its description of its accreditation status, in accordance with the terms of Section XV.E.

D. **Deny** accreditation to an applicant provided, however, that:

1. Prior to moving to deny accreditation to an institution where the denial would be based solely upon the institution’s failure to meet DEAC Standard XI: Financial Responsibility, the Commission will notify the institution of the identified deficiencies and afford the institution a one-time opportunity to provide the Commission with financial information that (a) would bear materially on the Commission’s evaluation of the identified deficiencies and (b) was not available to the institution prior to the Commission’s scheduled meeting to evaluate the institution’s application. If the Commission determines, in its sole and exclusive judgment, that the new information does not satisfy the foregoing criteria, the Commission will notify the institution that it is initiating an adverse action to deny the institution for accreditation or reaccreditation. If the Commission determines that the new information does satisfy the listed criteria, the Commission will consider the new information prior to making a decision on the institution’s application for accreditation or reaccreditation. Although a decision by the Commission to deny accreditation to an institution is an appealable decision, the determination by the Commission that the new information is insufficient to justify a re-evaluation of the institution’s compliance with Accreditation Standard XI is not.

2. If the Commission initiates an adverse action to deny an institution's application for renewal of its accreditation, the institution will retain its accredited status unless and until the earlier of (a) the period to appeal the decision lapses without the institution filing a notice of appeal or (b) the Commission's decision is upheld in its original form or as amended by the appeals panel. However, notice of the Commission's decision to deny a renewal of accreditation and the status of any appeal will be published on DEAC's website and must be included by the institution in its description of its accreditation status, in each case in accordance with the terms of Section XV.C. Institutions appealing a denial of accreditation must refrain from making or proposing any substantive changes. If the Commission initiates adverse action to deny an initial institution's application for accreditation, the institution may also elect to appeal such decision or may choose to reapply after one year.

E. **Good Cause:** The Commission may, in its sole discretion and upon written request of an institution providing detailed grounds for its request, agree to extend the Deferral Period or Show Cause Remediation Period, as applicable, for good cause shown. An institution requesting an extension must provide evidence, in its request, that it has made substantial, good faith progress toward compliance with the requirements of the deferral notice or show cause directive **and** that granting the extension will not impose an unreasonable burden on or otherwise cause harm to students. A "good cause" extension may be allowed, for example, when an institution needs additional time to more fully document the scope and permanence of its compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or to establish an extended history of such compliance. A decision to grant a "good cause" extension may be made contingent on the institution's submission of interim reports on progress and related data. If the result of a "good cause" extension results in a Show Cause Remediation Period longer than that authorized by federal regulation, the Commission notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education of its decision and the reason for the same. A decision by the Commission not to grant a "good cause" extension is not appealable.

X. ACTIONS AVAILABLE TO COMMISSION DURING AN ACCREDITATION TERM

The Commission may take any of the following actions (defined in Section XI below) with respect to an accredited institution during its accreditation term:

A. Direct the institution to undergo a special visit. The Commission may require a special visit due to unusual circumstances or failure by the institution to meet its obligations to DEAC. The Commission's requirement for a special visit may be triggered by:

- a serious or an unusually large number of student or other complaints e.g., "whistle-blower" complaints;
- state or federal investigations or legal action taken against an institution;
- an institution's failure to continue to comply with a condition of accreditation;
- reported negative financial conditions or events;
- a show cause directive issued by the Commission;

- governmental complaints against the institution; or
- similar serious concerns.

The procedure for special visits is as follows:

1. the institution is directed to submit a self-evaluation report with respect to the specific area(s) of concern;
2. the on-site visit is scheduled for 1-2 days depending upon the scope of the issue (which is determined by the concerns giving rise to the special visit);
3. the on-site team includes evaluators selected for their expertise in the area(s) of concern;
4. during the on-site visit, the on-site team reviews documents and interviews relevant institution personnel and/or students;
5. the on-site team's review culminates in a Chair's Report summarizing the team's findings;
6. the institution is invited to respond to the Chair's Report; and
7. a record is provided to the Commission consisting of the materials giving rise to the on-site visit, the institution's self-evaluation report, the Chair's Report, and the institution's response to the same.

Commission-ordered special visits are conducted in a timely fashion. In no case will the time frame for conducting and reporting the on-site evaluation extend beyond 12 months from the date the Commission is first made aware of any condition requiring a special visit.

If an institution refuses to agree to undergo a special visit, pay the fees for the visit in a timely manner, or observe the timelines specified by the Commission, it will be reported to the Commission for action, including withdrawing accreditation.

- B. **Mid-Term Show Cause Directive.** A show cause directive may be issued by the Commission to an accredited institution which the Commission has reason to believe is no longer in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards during an accreditation term. In such event, the institution is directed to show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. The mid-term issuance of a show cause directive shall follow the same terms as are set forth in Section IX.C. above. However, the decision by the Commission at the end of the Show Cause Remediation Period is whether or not to withdraw the institution's accreditation, extend the Show Cause Remediation Period for good cause, or vacate the show cause directive if warranted by the remedial actions implemented by the institution.
- C. If a DEAC member institution is the subject of an adverse action or negative change in accreditation status by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized accrediting agency, the Commission shall promptly review the institution's compliance with the relevant DEAC accreditation standards to determine if DEAC should also initiate an adverse action, issue a show cause directive or initiate such further investigation of the institution as it deems proper.

- D. The Commission may take immediate adverse action, without prior notice or issuance of a show cause directive, to initiate an action to withdraw accreditation from an institution or program if it determines, in its reasonable discretion, that an institution's violations of DEAC standards and/or policies warrant such immediate action. A decision to initiate an adverse action under the terms of this paragraph is subject to the due process rights set forth in Section XII below.

XI. DEFINITIONS RELATING TO COMMISSION ACTIONS

- A. **Definition of Adverse Action.** Two actions available to be taken by the Commission are considered "adverse actions" and therefore subject to appeal by an institution. These are:

1. the Commission's denial of an institution's application for accreditation or reaccreditation; and
2. the Commission's withdrawal of the existing accreditation of an institution for cause.

The Commission initiates an adverse action when it votes to deny accreditation or reaccreditation to an institution or to withdraw an institution's existing accreditation. The Commission's decision is subject to appeal and the adverse action only becomes final after the appeal process has been exhausted or after the right of appeal has been waived by the applicant institution. Until such time as the adverse action becomes final, an accredited institution is responsible for remaining in full compliance with DEAC accreditation standards and is subject to ongoing DEAC monitoring and directives, as applicable.

Adverse actions are disclosed to the institution, applicable state and federal regulatory agencies, other accrediting organizations as appropriate, and the public when they are initiated and when they become final pursuant to the terms of Section XV.

- B. **Definition of Final Decision.** A decision by the Commission to grant accreditation or reaccreditation to an institution is final as of the date on which the Commission votes for such a grant. A decision by the Commission to take adverse action is initiated by a vote of the Commission but does not become final until such time as the institution's right of appeal is exhausted or waived. Decisions taken by the Commission during an institution's term of accreditation that do not initiate adverse action (such as decisions to order a special visit or issue a show cause directive) are final when taken but are not subject to appeal except for decisions to deny a substantive change. An institution may only appeal (1) decisions not to approve a substantive change and (2) decisions by the Commission to initiate an adverse action.
- C. **Record.** The term "Record" refers to the body of materials submitted to the Commission and on which the Commission bases its review and decisions. In the context of applications for accreditation or reaccreditation, the Record typically consists of the eligibility application, the SER, the academic specialists reports and the institution's response to the same, the Chair's Report and the institution's response to the same, third party comments received by DEAC, and when relevant, annual reports, other interim

reports from the institution, and media reports. In the case of mid-accreditation reviews, the scope of the Record will be determined by the nature of the matter(s) giving rise to the review. In any decision-making process, the Commission may also consider (1) applicable state and federal regulations and guidelines; (2) applicable licensing requirements; (3) relevant rules, guidelines, and requirements of other accrediting organizations and educational standards organizations; (4) enforcement, disciplinary, investigative or other actions taken by state or federal entities, or accrediting organizations, with respect to the institution, and (5) DEAC's accreditation standards and published policies, procedures, forms, and website content.

XII. APPEALING A COMMISSION'S ADVERSE DECISION

Only decisions by the Commission to initiate adverse action or not to approve a substantive change can be appealed by an institution. The appeal is limited to a claim of material error in the decision attributable to (a) a failure of the Record to support the decision or (b) a material misapplication of DEAC's accreditation standards or published procedures or policies which materially affected the outcome of the Commission's decision-making process. The fact that the Record considered by the Commission could have also supported a different decision is not sufficient grounds for the appeals panel to remand the matter if the Commission's actual decision is also supported by the Record. The institution is entitled to be represented by counsel in connection with any or all portions of its appeal.

An institution must first appeal an appealable Commission decision to an independent appeals panel as set forth in this Section before challenging that decision in any other forum.

A. Nature of Appeals Process. DEAC is committed to fairly evaluating each institution before voting to deny or withdraw accreditation or before denying a proposal for substantive change. Accordingly, DEAC does not consider or approach a review of an appealable decision by the appeals panel to be an adversarial procedure. Rather, the goal of the appeals process is to ensure that decisions to initiate adverse actions and denials of substantive changes were properly considered and were supported by the Record. DEAC's participation in the review process is therefore limited primarily to ensuring that information provided to the appeals panel is accurate, not misleading, and is supported by the Record.

B. Appeal Process

- 1. Application for Appeal.** An institution appealing an appealable decision by the Commission must submit the Application for Appeal form (available from DEAC's website) together with the applicable appeals fee (see fees page on DEAC website) to the executive director of DEAC within 10 days of the receipt of DEAC's letter advising the institution of the decision that is being appealed. The application for appeal shall state generally the basis on which the appeal is being made. An institution's failure to submit the application for appeal and associated fee within the 10-day period will waive its right of appeal, and the Commission's decision will automatically become final and take full force and effect.

2. **Statement of Appeal.** An institution which has timely filed an application for appeal must then submit a written statement setting forth all of the reasons the institution believes that the Commission's decision was in clear error and the part or parts of the Record that support its positions. The institution may provide alternative bases for a determination of error, but evidence in support of each basis is limited to the materials and information included in the Record; no evidence or information not included in the Record will be considered by the appeals panel. The institution's statement must be delivered to the DEAC executive director within thirty (30) days of the institution's receiving notification of the decision being appealed.
3. **Burden of Proof.** The institution has the burden to show that the Commission's decision resulted from errors or omissions in the execution of DEAC's policies and procedures or that the decision was not based on substantial evidence in the Record. One or more specific procedural errors or unsupported findings by the Commission will not result in a remand if the balance of the Record independently supports the decision taken by the Commission. No new materials may be presented for the appeals panel's consideration on appeal.
4. **DEAC Response.** DEAC may, in its discretion, submit a written response to the appellant's statement within 30 days following its receipt of the appellant institution's statement.
5. **Request for Oral Argument.** In its written statement, the appellant institution must state whether or not it wants the appeals panel to hear oral argument. The names and affiliations of those appearing to make the oral presentation should be included with the request when available; if not available at the time of the request, and in the absence of extenuating circumstances justifying a later disclosure, the institution shall provide the same no later than seven days prior to the scheduled hearing date. If the appellant institution does not request oral argument, then the appeals panel will make its decision based on the Record, the Commission's written findings and reasons related to the decision being appealed, the appellant's statement, and DEAC's response to that statement (if any) (the "Record for Appeal").
6. **Materials Provided to the Appeals Panel.** DEAC is responsible for providing to the appeals panel, within 45 days following the appellant institution's submission of its statement, a copy of the Record for Appeal. A copy of DEAC's response will be provided to the institution on the same date.

C. Hearing Procedure

1. A hearing before the appeals panel shall be scheduled within 60 days following the delivery of the Record for Appeal to appeals panel members. The hearing will be held virtually unless the appeals panel determines, in its sole discretion, that the physical presence of the panel and the parties is reasonably required. The appellant institution shall have 30 minutes in which to argue its case in front of the appeals panel. The 30 minutes does not include the time attributable to questions from the appeals panel and the institution's response to the same. The time period may also be

- extended by the appeals panel in its discretion. Oral argument by the institution may not include arguments not previously made in its statement. DEAC shall have at least one representative present at the hearing. The DEAC representative shall participate in the proceeding solely for the purpose of correcting errors or misleading statements made in the process. The institution shall have the opportunity to respond to any such correction by indicating the part(s) of the Record supporting the perceived error or misleading statement. Depending on the nature of the hearing (e.g., whether virtual or not), DEAC will indicate to the appeals panel its interest in speaking and the appeals panel will afford it an opportunity to do so in its discretion. Any DEAC correction and institutional response shall not be included within the 30-minute time limitation.
2. The appeal hearing will be recorded by stenographic or electronic means, and a copy of the same will be provided to the institution upon request.
 3. The appeals panel will render its decision within 30 days following the hearing date, if a hearing is held, or within 30 days following the submission of the Record for Appeal if no hearing is requested. The decision shall provide a summary of the appeals panel rationale for its decision. The decision will be delivered to the DEAC executive director, who shall provide it to the Commission and the institution within one business day.

D. Appeals Panel

1. The institution's appeal is heard by an independent appeals panel that does not include DEAC staff or members of the Commission and serves as an additional level of due process for the institution. It can affirm, amend, or remand the prior decision of the Commission as set forth below.
2. The appeals panel does not have authority to evaluate or rule on the reasonableness of eligibility criteria, procedures, or accreditation standards. Its role is to determine whether the Commission's action was clearly erroneous in that it was not supported by any reasonable evaluation of the Record and/or attributable to a material error in applying DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures.
3. The appeals panel consists of three people appointed by DEAC: a public member, an academic, and an administrator. Potential members of an appeals panel are selected by DEAC's executive director from the ranks of former members of the Commission, the corps of DEAC evaluators, and active staff of DEAC-accredited institutions who have completed DEAC's evaluator training program. In order to ensure a prompt hearing of appeals, DEAC maintains a pool of potential appeals panel candidates who have agreed to serve if requested. These candidates receive annual training on DEAC's accreditation standards, evaluation processes and procedures, conflict of interest policy, and the appeals panel process, scope, and responsibility.
4. Candidates selected for the appeals panel must possess knowledge of DEAC's accreditation mission, standards, and procedures. The candidates cannot include any current member of the Commission or any person involved in an evaluation of the

appellant institution completed within the previous five years and cannot have a conflict of interest as defined in DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy (see Part Four of *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*). The executive director submits a list of proposed appeals panel members to the appellant institution. Within 10 calendar days of receiving the list of proposed panel members, the appellant institution may request, in writing, that any person or persons be removed from the list on the basis of potential conflict of interest as defined in DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy. If DEAC determines that the request is reasonable, the candidate will be replaced.

E. Decisions Available to the Appeals Panel

1. **Affirm:** If the appeals panel determines that the institution has failed to meet its burden of proof in showing that the Commission's action was not supported by the record or was attributable to a material error in its application of DEAC's published policies and procedures, it must affirm the decision of the Commission.
2. **Remand:** The appeals panel may remand a decision to the Commission for reconsideration when it finds that the Record on Appeal (and, as applicable, the hearing transcript) did not support the Commission's decision. In its decision to remand, the appeals panel must identify those material facts that it finds the Commission failed to consider or where the Commission otherwise committed one or more material errors in its deliberations and decision-making process. The Commission must act in a manner consistent with the appeals panel's decisions and/or instructions.
3. **Affirm and Amend:** If the appeals panel determines that, although it agrees with the Commission's decision based on the entirety of the Record for Appeal, one or more elements of the Commission's stated reasoning or procedural actions was nevertheless clearly in error, the appeals panel may amend the decision. An appeals panel decision to amend a Commission decision remands the matter to the Commission in order that the Commission modify the bases for its decision in accordance with the specific direction of the appeals panel.
4. **Communication of Decision:** The appeals panel will communicate its decision to DEAC in a written report setting forth the basis for its decision. DEAC will then notify the institution of the decision in writing.

F. DEAC Receipt and Implementation of Appeals Panel Decisions

If the Commission's decision to initiate an adverse action or to deny a request for substantive change is upheld by the appeals panel in its original or in an amended form,

1. the Commission's decision takes effect pursuant to the terms of Section XII.D.;
2. DEAC will so notify the institution and provide the institution with a period of 60 days in which to file a written comment to the decision as provided under Section XV.G; and
3. the institution is not eligible to reapply for accreditation or for the applicable

substantive change for a period of one year from the date of the appeals panel decision.

If the appeals panel remands the matter to the Commission for further evaluation and decision making pursuant to the appeals panel's instructions, the Commission will undertake such re-evaluation and decision making at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at an earlier scheduled meeting, in its discretion. If, on remand, the Commission again votes against the accreditation or reaccreditation of an institution or in favor of the withdrawal of accreditation from an institution, or if it again votes to deny approval for a substantive change, the institution is entitled to a right of appeal with respect to that decision.

- G. **Confidentiality of Proceedings.** The Record for Appeal, the transcript of the hearing (if applicable), and the appeals panel report to DEAC (collectively, the Appellate Record) shall be treated as DEAC proprietary information and shall not be disclosed to any third party except as required in connection with any arbitration proceedings initiated by an institution.

XIII. BINDING ARBITRATION

If an institution elects to dispute the Commission's initiation of an adverse action or a Commission decision not to approve a substantive change beyond the appeals process administered by DEAC, its dispute shall be resolved exclusively through binding arbitration. To initiate such arbitration, the institution must submit to DEAC a request for a de novo review by an independent arbitrator within five business days of its receipt of written notice from the Commission of its decision (after the appeal has been exhausted) together with the applicable non-refundable arbitration fee (see DEAC website for arbitration fee). Such arbitration shall be conducted under the auspices of the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be initiated by the institution with the AAA within 30 days following the institution's receipt of notice that the adverse action taken by the Commission has become final. The sole and exclusive venue for the arbitration shall be the District of Columbia.

Arbitration under this section shall be conducted by a single arbitrator who must have familiarity and experience with the field of higher education and the federal rules governing accrediting organizations. The AAA will provide a list of qualified arbitrator candidates. The institution and DEAC will use good faith efforts to select an arbitrator from the AAA list; if they are unable to do so, the AAA will select the arbitrator. The question(s) to be resolved by the arbitrator are limited to whether the Commission's decision was clearly erroneous because it was (a) not reasonably supported by the Record for Appeal and/or (b) solely attributable to a misapplication of DEAC's accreditation standards or published policies and procedures. The fact that the Record considered by the Commission could have also supported a different decision is not sufficient grounds for an arbitrator to reverse the decision if the Commission's actual decision is also supported by the Record.

The arbitration shall be held within ninety days following the submission of the Record of Appeal to the Appeals Panel. The date for the hearing shall be determined by the arbitrator in their discretion but may be revised by the arbitrator in their discretion in response to a request

for change from either party. The institution may submit a brief of no longer than 20 pages at least 30 days prior to the hearing date. DEAC may respond to the institution's brief with a brief of no more than 20 pages. No discovery shall be authorized nor may evidence in addition to that in the Record for Appeal be introduced in either party's briefs or oral argument. At the arbitration hearing, each party shall be entitled to 20 minutes of oral argument, including questions from the arbitrator. A party may reserve up to five minutes for use in a closing statement. A transcript of the hearing shall be made and provided in electronic form to the arbitrator and each of the parties. The arbitrator shall make a decision based on the Record for Appeal, the briefs of the parties, and the arbitration hearing (the "Arbitral Record").

The arbitrator may affirm, affirm in an amended form, or remand the Commission decision at issue. The decision of the arbitrator shall include a summary of the reasoning supporting the decision and shall be delivered to the institution and DEAC within 60 days following the arbitration hearing. The decision of the arbitrator is binding on the parties and may be reviewed by the federal courts only for abuse of discretion. It is enforceable by all courts of competent jurisdiction. The arbitration proceedings, arbitration filings and Record for Appeal shall be treated as confidential by the parties except as may be required to enforce their respective rights. The arbitrator's decision shall not be deemed confidential.

The expense of the AAA, the arbitrator, and the hearing transcription shall be shared equally by the parties. Otherwise, each party shall bear its own costs in connection with the arbitration.

XIV. RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

A. **Records Maintained.** DEAC maintains in electronic form complete and accurate records of:

1. its last full accreditation reviews of each institution, including the application, on-site evaluation team reports, the institution's responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted between regular reviews, and a copy of the institution's most recent Self-Evaluation Report;
2. all decisions made throughout each institution's affiliation with DEAC regarding its accreditation and any substantive change, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions;
3. all materials associated with any appeal or arbitration that may be initiated by an institution; and
4. minutes of all Board of Directors and Commission meetings.

B. **Confidentiality of Records:**

1. Institution's Obligations with Respect to Information Related to a Commission

Action or Proceeding. Reports, evaluations (including curriculum evaluations), internal rubrics, analyses, third-party comments (whether or not solicited and including communications from federal and/or state entities or other accrediting or licensing organizations), financial data and analyses, investigative findings, professional advice, and other materials related to or created in connection with DEAC business or accrediting operations (individually and collectively, and in each case to the extent not made publicly available by the Commission, “DEAC proprietary information”) should be treated as confidential to DEAC and may not be disclosed by an institution to any third party, directly or indirectly without the prior written authorization of DEAC, except

- a. as required in connection with federal or state regulatory proceedings or pursuant to judicial process;
- b. in the context of any appeals panel or arbitration proceeding pursued by an institution, provided that such disclosures shall be made under provisions of confidentiality equivalent to or more stringent than those set forth in this paragraph;
- c. to the extent consisting solely of third-party materials, if such materials have also been made available to the public by such third parties; and
- d. to the extent reasonably required by an institution’s governing body and professional advisors, provided that any such persons or entities to whom information is disclosed are bound by written agreement or professional code of ethics not to further disclose the information.

The foregoing restrictions on disclosure do not apply to DEAC proprietary information, which DEAC makes generally available to the public on its website or through other public disclosures. However, DEAC’s disclosure of DEAC proprietary information to any other accrediting agency, to a state or federal governmental entity or regulatory body or in the context of appeals panel or arbitration processes, does not impair or modify the restrictions on disclosure set forth above. Nothing in the foregoing shall be construed as converting institution information and data into DEAC proprietary information when not incorporated in materials, reports, analyses, or similar submissions or communications with DEAC.

2. DEAC’s Obligations with Respect to Information Provided by Institutions. DEAC does not disclose information provided by an institution in connection with DEAC accreditation evaluations or other matters specific to that institution except
 - a. to the extent that such information is made generally available to the public by the institution or another third party;
 - b. as provided under DEAC’s then-current policies and procedures including, without limitation, those set forth in the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*;

- c. when requested, required, or directed by a state or federal government entity or regulation, law enforcement entity, judicial or administrative process, or a state, federal, or industry accrediting or licensing body;
- d. in connection with legal requirements or proceedings, whether or not DEAC is a direct party to such proceedings; and
- e. in situations where, in DEAC's reasonable discretion, the Commission determines that disclosure is appropriate to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process and/or agency.

In addition, information relating to non-U.S. locations or institutions may also be shared with and at the request or direction of applicable foreign authorities, licensing bodies, legal requirements, and judicial or administrative proceedings.

XV. NOTIFICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING BY DEAC

- A. **Initial and Renewal of Accreditation:** DEAC provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes its decision to grant accreditation or accreditation renewal.
- B. **Action Notwithstanding Third-Party Action:** If DEAC grants initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation to an institution notwithstanding the threatened interim or final adverse or negative actions taken against the institution by another recognized accrediting agency or state agency, DEAC will provide the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, within 30 days of its action, a thorough explanation of why the previous action by the accrediting agency or state does not preclude DEAC's action.
- C. **Denial or Withdrawal of Accreditation:** DEAC provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission initiates an action to deny or withdraw accreditation to an institution. DEAC requires the institution to disclose the initiation of an adverse action to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the Commission's decision. Such notice must, at minimum, meet the requirements of Section XVI.A.3. below.

If the initiated adverse action becomes final following the exhaustion or waiver of the institution's right of appeal, DEAC will again provide written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the

adverse action becomes final. DEAC also requires the institution to disclose that the adverse action had become final and that the institution is no longer accredited by DEAC to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the final adverse decision and consistent with the requirements of Section XVI.A.3 below.

- D. **Notice of Deferral.** DEAC publishes a notice of deferral on its website within 30 days after the Commission makes a decision to defer a decision on an institution's application for accreditation renewal.
- E. **Show Cause Directive:** DEAC provides written notice of the Commission's issuance of a Show Cause Directive to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, and the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public (through the DEAC website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes a decision to place an institution on Show Cause. DEAC requires the institution that is subject to the show cause directive to disclose the action to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the show cause order. Such notice must, at minimum, meet the requirements of Section XVI.A.2. below.
- F. **Public Notice.** DEAC publishes on its website, including on its directory of institutions page, notice of any of the decisions listed above within thirty days of the Commission's decision. The notice provides a summary of the reasons for the decision and the date, if any, on which the institution is next subject to a review.
- G. **Additional Information Regarding Adverse Actions.** Within 60 days after a Commission decision to deny or withdraw accreditation becomes final, DEAC makes available to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the Commission's decision and the official comments, if any, that the affected institution makes regarding such decision. If no official comments by the institution are provided within 14 days of notification, DEAC will document that the affected institution was offered the opportunity to provide an official comment.
- H. **Resigning or Voluntarily Withdrawing Accreditation:** Within 10 business days of receiving notification from an institution of its decision to resign or voluntarily withdraw from DEAC accreditation, DEAC posts a notice of the institution's resignation or voluntary withdrawal of accreditation on its website and provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state licensing agencies or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting organizations.
- I. **Accreditation Lapses:** If an institution elects not to renew its accreditation, DEAC posts notice on its website within 10 business days of the date upon which the institution's accreditation lapses and provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state licensing agencies or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting organizations.

- J. **Potential Institutional Malfeasance.** DEAC submits to the U.S. Secretary of Education the name of any institution it accredits that DEAC has reason to believe is failing to meet its FSA Title IV responsibilities or is engaging in fraud, abuse, or other unethical conduct along with DEAC's reasons for concern about the institution's activities. In addition, DEAC informs the U.S. Secretary of Education whenever it finds significant or systemic deficiencies in the institution's assignment of credit hours.
- K. **Scope of Public Information:** DEAC will make available to the public and in certain official DEAC publications, including its website and published *DEAC Directory of Accredited Institutions*, the following information:
- the name, address, phone number, and website address of an accredited institution;
 - the month and year accredited and month and year for accreditation renewal;
 - a summary list of programs offered by the institution;
 - a summary of information pertaining to a deferral of accreditation;
 - a summary of information pertaining to a show cause directive;
 - a summary of information pertaining to an initiated or final adverse action;
 - a summary of information pertaining to an action subject to appeal; and
 - the date of an institution's voluntary withdrawal of accreditation.
- L. **Sharing Information with Government Entities and Other Accrediting Organizations:** DEAC, upon request, shares with other appropriately recognized accrediting agencies and recognized state agencies information about the accreditation status of a DEAC-accredited institution and any adverse actions or show cause directives it has issued or initiated with respect to that institution. Without limiting the foregoing, DEAC grants all reasonable special requests for accreditation information made by other accrediting organizations and government entities.
- M. **Institutional Release of DEAC Regarding Sharing of Information.** Institutions accredited by or seeking accreditation from DEAC provide, as part of their application for accreditation, a release from liability of DEAC with respect to all actions taken by DEAC to elicit, receive, review, and share information from state or federal regulatory agencies, other government entities, third-party accrediting and licensing organizations, employers, businesses, students, and other third parties in connection with and for the purposes of evaluating the institution.
- N. **Authorized Disclosure of Information:** When an institution requests specific confidential accreditation information to be released to third parties, the president/CEO of the institution or an institution-designated official must provide a written release on official letterhead to the executive director stating the precise information to be released and the party or parties to whom the information is to be provided. DEAC will release such information (1) subject to any qualifications or restrictions it may elect to provide with respect to the disclosure and (2) to the extent that release of the information can be effected with minimal cost and effort and does not disclose confidential DEAC or third-

party information.

O. **Routine Disclosures to the U.S. Department of Education:** DEAC provides the following information to the U.S. Department of Education as a matter of course:

- A list, updated annually, of its accredited institutions and programs, which may be provided electronically.
- A copy of the *DEAC Directory of Accredited Institutions* (updated annually).
- A summary of DEAC's major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if requested by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
- Any proposed change in DEAC's procedures or accreditation standards that might alter its scope of recognition or compliance with the federal criteria for recognition.
- The name of any institution that DEAC accredits that has been "certified" by DEAC as being eligible for participation in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs under DEAC's FSA Title IV Programs substantive change procedure.
- If the U.S. Secretary of Education requests, information that may bear upon an accredited institution's compliance with its FSA Title IV responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution to participate in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs or a significant or systematic noncompliance in the assignment of credit hours.
- Within 30 days of becoming aware that an institution has experienced an increase in enrollment of 50 percent or more within an institutional fiscal year.

P. **Specific Disclosures to Institutions.** DEAC reviews on a case-by-case basis whether or not to notify an institution when DEAC has provided information or materials to or otherwise has had contact with the U.S. Department of Education relating to potential malfeasance and/or an institution's eligibility for participation in FSA Title IV programs or compliance with the terms of such programs. Notwithstanding the foregoing, DEAC treats a contact or request from the U.S. Department of Education for information concerning an institution as being confidential, upon the specific request of the Department.

XVI. PUBLIC DISCLOSURES BY INSTITUTION

A. **Disclosures of Accreditation Status.** Institutions may only refer to their accreditation status as set forth below based on the specific scope of their accreditation.

1. Accredited. An institution which has been accredited by DEAC may refer to its accredited status as follows:

- Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- DEAC Accredited

2. Accredited but Operating Under Show Cause Directive. If an institution that has

been accredited by DEAC is operating under a show cause directive, the institution must amend any public notice of its accreditation status by adding clear and conspicuous language stating that the institution is operating under the show cause directive and the scope of that directive. Within seven business days following its receipt of the show cause directive from DEAC, the institution must also notify its students and prospective students that it is operating under a show cause directive (and the scope of the directive) by publication on its website and by individual written notice to enrolled students, which notice may be via email if the institution believes that its email address for the student is current or by first class mail if the institution has no current email address for the student.

3. Notice to Students of Adverse Actions. Within seven business days following its receipt of notice from DEAC that the Commission has initiated an adverse action to deny reaccreditation or withdraw accreditation from the institution, the institution must promptly notify its students and prospective students of DEAC's initiation of such adverse action by publication on the institution's website and by individual written notice to enrolled students, which notice may be via email if the institution believes that its email address for the student is current or by first class mail if the institution has no current email address for the student. The institution may also, in that notice, indicate whether the institution plans to appeal the Commission's decision or whether an appeal is pending, as applicable, and that the institution's accreditation remains in place during such appeals proceedings. The institution shall update that notice as applicable.

Without limiting the foregoing, if an adverse action becomes final after the appeal has been concluded or if the institution elects not to appeal the Commission's decision, DEAC shall so notify the institution and the institution must follow the same reporting and notice requirements as are applicable above with respect to the initiation of an adverse action by the Commission.

- B. **Additional Disclosure Requirements.** Institutions must disclose to the public, including on its website in a clear, conspicuous and readily accessible manner, certain additional information as required by state/federal regulation or DEAC requirement, including, without limitation, disclosures required under the accreditation standards and DEAC's website checklist (see DEAC website).
- C. **Correction of Misleading or Inaccurate Information.** DEAC requires that an accredited institution correct any misleading or inaccurate information it provides to third parties relating to (a) the institution's accreditation status, DEAC, or the DEAC accreditation process or (b) other information that an institution may be required to disclose under DEAC policies, DEAC accreditation standards, or federal/state regulations. DEAC will notify the institution of any misleading or inaccurate information that comes to DEAC's attention and request that the institution immediately make the correction, post a notice of the correction, and document to DEAC that the correction has been made. Failure to do so within 10 days may result in an order of a special visit or other disciplinary review action, including but not limited to, the issuance

of a show cause directive.

XVII. INTERIM MONITORING OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

An institution maintains its accreditation by remaining in continuous and timely compliance with all DEAC accreditation standards and eligibility requirements; all DEAC reporting requirements; all applicable local, state, and federal requirements; and its payment obligations to DEAC. DEAC monitors and evaluates an institution's ongoing compliance with DEAC's accreditation standards through both formal and informal processes, including, without limitation, those set forth below in this Section, the self-reporting obligations of the institution set forth within Section XVII, and the procedural requirements relating to substantive changes (see Section XVIII).

The Commission reserves the right to order a comprehensive or focused review of an institution whenever it has reason to believe that the institution may not be in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards and/or procedures. In all cases, DEAC affords the institution an opportunity to respond within a reasonable time frame to any findings that the evaluation team may make based on such review before the Commission makes a decision regarding the institution's accredited status.

A. **Annual Reports:** Each year, DEAC requires the submission of an annual report by each institution holding accreditation status as of December 31 of any given year (see Section XVII.A.8. below). The annual report and all accompanying documentation are due to DEAC in accordance with formats and timelines published or otherwise provided by DEAC. To the extent that the annual report reflects a significant change in any metric, including, by way of example, enrollment figures or number of programs, the institution must address, within the annual report, the reasons for, impact of, and internal response to the change. Without limiting the foregoing, DEAC provides the following guidelines to institutions with respect to the threshold changes in enrollments, program numbers, and student satisfaction percentages that automatically trigger a requirement for a more extended response and explanation.

1. **Significant Growth or Decline in Enrollments:** DEAC defines significant growth in enrollments as an increase in enrollment of more than 50% in one institutional year (pro-rated as necessary to complete the institution's annual report and updated within 30 days following the end of the institution's institutional year where that is not the calendar year).
2. If an institution reports "significant growth in enrollments," it must: (a) explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the growth and what additional staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans were employed to meet the needs of the increased number of students being served; (b) identify the programs experiencing the most growth by indicating the percentage of growth since the last annual report, listing the reasons for the growth in the identified programs and explaining the institution's plans for accommodating the enrollment growth; and (c) describe any strategic plan or other response the institution is considering or has implemented to address the increase in

enrollment numbers.

3. If an institution reports “significant decline in enrollments,” it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the decline; the impact on staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans; and any strategic plan or other response the institution is considering or has implemented to address the decline.
4. A “significant decline in enrollments” is defined as an enrollment decline of 25 percent or more since the last annual report.
5. **Significant Growth or Decline in the Number of Programs:** DEAC defines growth in the number of programs as significant if, in a calendar year,
 - an institution offering 1-3 programs adds more than two new programs;
 - an institution offering 4-10 programs adds more than three new programs;
 - an institution offering 11-20 programs adds more than four new programs;
 - an institution offering 21 or more programs adds more than six new programs.
6. If an institution reports “significant growth in the number of programs,” it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the growth and what additional staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans were employed to meet the needs of the increased number of programs being offered, as well as what strategic plans the institution is considering or has implemented to support, continue or limit the growth in programs.
7. If an institution reports “significant decrease in the number of programs,” it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for discontinuing programs and the impact on staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans, as well as what strategic plans the institution is considering or has implemented to address the decline in program numbers. A “significant decline in the number of programs” is defined as discontinuing 25 percent or more of its programs since the last annual report.
8. A “program” is a non-degree vocational or certificate program (e.g., medical billing and coding) or a degree program (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice).
9. **Significant Changes in Financial Condition:** The annual report requires the submission of audited financial statements and additional financial information.
 - a. An institution participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs reports additional information describing its participation and submits audited comparative financial statements, including its compliance audit for its most recent fiscal year, within 180 days following the end of the fiscal year.

- b. An institution submits audited or reviewed financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years prepared on a comparative basis and in accordance with Section XI. Financial Responsibility standards. DEAC reviews the financial statements and determines whether further reporting is required or other appropriate action is necessary.
 - c. All institutions are required to address and explain any significant change in their financial condition since the previous year's annual report.
10. **Student Satisfaction Benchmarks:** If an institution's student satisfaction rate falls below 75 percent, or if completion and graduation rates are not within the benchmark range for student satisfaction established by DEAC, the institution must explain the reasons for not meeting established benchmarks and document corrective actions taken and planned.
11. **Commission Review and Follow-Up Action:** DEAC staff acknowledge the receipt of all annual reports and request additional supporting documentation as necessary. All annual reports are reviewed and summarized by the staff, and significant changes are reported and presented to the Commission. Annually, at its mid-year meeting, the Commission considers any significant, salient items reported by institutions and initiates further follow-up actions as necessary. These may include:
- placing limits on an institution's future enrollment or program growth if ongoing compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or procedures is a concern;
 - requesting an institution to provide additional supporting documentation regarding significant growth or decline in enrollments or programs; and/or
 - requesting additional information on any part or parts of an institution's annual report.
- B. **Title IV Program Compliance.** DEAC reviews information provided by an institution participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs to verify (1) continued compliance with its federal student assistance program responsibilities based on the most recent "official cohort default rates" published by the U.S. Department of Education, (2) results of its audited comparative financial statements, and (3) its compliance audit, program review information, and any other information provided to DEAC by the U.S. Department of Education. DEAC will investigate and the Commission will direct such further action as appropriate if an institution appears to be noncompliant with its FSA Title IV requirements. DEAC is obligated under federal regulations [CFR 602.27(a)(6)] to report to the U.S. Secretary of Education an institution it has reason to believe is failing to meet its Federal Student Assistance Title IV program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse.

- C. **Actions by Other Accrediting Agencies.** If another accrediting agency places an institution on probation or withdraws/revokes the accreditation of the institution or program, DEAC will promptly review the accreditation status it has previously granted to that institution to determine whether there is cause to change that status.
- D. **Actions by State Agencies.** DEAC reviews and takes appropriate action regarding the accreditation status of any institution for which DEAC has received information from the appropriate state agency that the institution is subject to any of the following actions:
1. An action by a state agency potentially leading to the suspension, withdrawal/revocation, or termination of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education.
 2. An action by a state agency to suspend, withdraw/revoke, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education subject to appeal. If a DEAC-accredited institution loses its licensure/authorization in its state of domicile, its accreditation is automatically withdrawn as of the date of the loss of state licensure/authorization. Such a withdrawal of accreditation may be appealed by an institution pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section XII.
- E. **Notification Reports:** An institution must immediately notify DEAC, in writing, of any actions the institution plans to take or has taken, or of actions taken or expected to be taken against it by any accrediting, licensing, or state agency if those actions have the capacity to affect the compliance of the institution with DEAC accreditation standards and/or the reputation of the institution or DEAC, either directly or indirectly (e.g., through media coverage). This includes the institution's resolution of any complaints in a forthright, prompt, amicable, and equitable manner to DEAC's satisfaction.

XVIII. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

A. **Scope and Definition.** A substantive change is one that may significantly affect an institution's quality, mission, scope, operations including primary methods of delivering programs, or control. Substantive changes are reviewed to ensure that changes in educational offerings, teaching modalities, locations, scope of offerings, and control of the institution are or will be made in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. A substantive change must be approved by the Commission or DEAC senior staff before the change can be included in the institution's scope of accreditation. Institutions currently operating under a show cause directive may not implement a substantive change unless such change is required to cure an identified deficiency and is approved by the Commission. Similar restrictions may be included in deferral notices, as determined on a case-by-case basis.

The actions listed below are considered substantive changes that require DEAC approval. Institutions should note that DEAC does not allow institutions to establish an "additional location" or a "branch" as these terms are defined in 34 CFR 600.2.²

² DEAC provides the U.S. Department of Education's definitions in the Glossary found in Part Four of the *Accreditation Handbook*.

1. Any substantive change in the established mission or objectives of the institution.
2. Any change in the institution's name.
3. Any change in the institution's legal status, form of control, or ownership.
4. Any change in the institution's location of the main facility, headquarters, or administrative site or addition of a facility geographically apart from the main facility.
5. Any addition of a direct assessment program, whether or not direct assessment is already offered in connection with other programs.
6. Any addition of a new program in a field related to a field of study already within the scope of the institution's accreditation.
7. Any addition of programs that represent a significant departure from the existing offerings or educational programs or method of delivery from those that were offered or used when the agency last evaluated the institution for accreditation.
8. Entry by an institution participating in an FSA Title IV program into a written arrangement under 34 CFR 668.5 where an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV HEA programs offers more than 25 percent and up to 50 percent of one or more of the Title IV participating institution's educational programs.
9. Any addition of a program at a degree or credential level different from the educational offerings currently included in the institution's scope of accreditation.
10. A change in the way an institution measures student progress, including whether the institution measures progress in clock hours or credit hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters, or uses time-based or non-time-based methods.
11. A substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program or a change from clock hours to credit hours to measure student progress in one or more programs.
12. Any addition of an in-residence program component.
13. Any addition of a new division.
14. The acquisition of any other institution or any program or location of another institution by the institution, an affiliate of the institution, or the institution's holding company.
15. Entering into a written arrangement with another accredited organization or an unaccredited organization to provide more than 25 percent and up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs.
16. An institution seeking certification to participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs.
17. Any new engagement in international activities beyond that included in the institution's existing grant of accreditation.
18. Any other change that may significantly affect an institution's quality; mission; scope; operations, including primary methods of delivering programs; or control.

B. Institutions that have been subject to show cause orders over the prior three academic years, must receive prior approval for the following additional changes (all other institutions must report these changes within 30 days to DEAC):

- (1) An aggregate change of 25 percent or more of the clock hours, credit hours, or content of

a program since the agency's most recent accreditation review.

(2) Entering into a written arrangement under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEA programs offers up to 25 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs.

Where reporting is required, institutions should submit a letter to DEAC at least 30 days prior to implementation of the change providing the specifics of the change, including, without limitation, impacted courses, the reason for the change, and the faculty responsible for reviewing the changes and certifying that these are the only revisions to the course or program being proposed.

C. Process for Seeking Approval of Substantive Changes.

1. Filing of Applicable Form and Review Process. A more detailed description of the categories of substantive changes covered by this Section XVIII and the process for seeking approval of those changes is set forth below in Section XIX.
2. With respect to applications for approval of a written arrangement with another accredited organization or an unaccredited organization to provide more than 25 percent and up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs, DEAC will make a final decision within 90 days of receipt of a materially complete application, unless it determines that significant circumstances related to the substantive change require further review, to occur within 180 days.
3. Substantive Change Approvals Delegated to DEAC Senior Staff. Certain substantive changes may be evaluated by DEAC senior staff rather than the Commission. Any such delegation of authority shall be made by the Commission in its sole discretion. Such substantive changes include:
 - a. a change in the institution's name;
 - b. the addition of a new program in a field related to a field of study already within the scope of the institution's accreditation;
 - c. any new engagement in international activities beyond that included in the institution's existing grant of accreditation; and
 - d. any change in the institution's location of the main facility, headquarters or administrative site, or any addition of a facility geographically apart from the main facility.

With respect to any request for a substantive change delegated to DEAC staff, the staff may approve such change, which approval shall have the same effect as if made by the Commission or refer the substantive change to the Commission for review and disposition.

4. Approvals with Subsequent Site Visit Requirements. With respect to certain substantive changes approved by the Commission, DEAC requires an on-site visit within six to 12 months following the school's implementation of the change to

determine the impact of the change on the institution's continued compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. The institution is required to submit a report providing information specific to the impact of the change prior to the onsite visit. The institution shall also have a reasonable opportunity to respond to the on-site team's findings prior to the Commission's evaluation of whether the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

5. **Notification of Decision.** After evaluating the review file for the proposed substantive change, the Commission (or DEAC staff) determines whether or not and the extent to which the change, when implemented, is likely to affect the compliance of the institution with DEAC accreditation standards is consistent with the institution's mission, and will not be detrimental to students. On that basis, the Commission (or DEAC staff) determines whether to approve or deny the change or require additional review. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of such determination and the effective date. The notice includes a summary of the reasons for the decision and, if further review is required, the parameters of that review including, without limitation, the information and other materials to be provided by the institution and the time frame for the same. DEAC also notifies the USDE and other relevant third parties of a decision to approve or deny a substantive change when required to do so by applicable regulations or when otherwise deemed appropriate by DEAC in its sole and exclusive discretion.
6. In the event of a denial by the Commission of a proposed substantive change, an institution may appeal the Commission's decision to an independent appeals panel pursuant to the provisions of Section XII or take actions designed to address the Commission's identified concerns and resubmit the proposal for substantive change, as supported by the revised record. Denials of substantive changes are not considered adverse actions but are subject to DEAC's appeal procedures.

- D. **Cumulative Changes.** Proposed changes or an accumulation of changes implemented or proposed during an institution's accreditation term may be so significant as to effectively transform the institution, requiring a comprehensive re-evaluation of the institution. Examples of accumulation of changes which would trigger such a new evaluation include but are not limited to: (1) if an institution proposes to materially change its mission and to make material changes to its curriculum and/or method of delivery, (2) if an institution adds programs that represent a significant departure from its existing offerings, adds a new division or in-residence component, and changes the way in which it measures student progress, (3) if an institution adds new degree or credential offerings and enters into a written arrangement with another organization to provide more than 25% of the institution's programs, or (4) any similar combination of substantive changes which, together, significantly alter the educational profile, pedagogical approach, targeted student population, or program offerings. In such event, DEAC will notify the institution and offer the institution an opportunity to provide, within a reasonable time frame, additional information and/or material to demonstrate that the impact of the changes, singly or cumulatively, is not so extensive as to alter its essential mission, character, operations, or performance. Only after reviewing the

institution's response will the Commission make a final decision on whether or not to order a comprehensive or more limited review of the institution.

XIX. PROCESS WITH RESPECT TO EACH SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

The application forms for each category of substantive change for which an institution seeks approval can be found on the DEAC website. Substantive changes are reviewed to ensure that the proposed changes can be implemented and supported by the institution in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. With respect to most categories of substantive change, the process for applying for approval is set forth below (the "Standard Substantive Change Approval Process"):

- 1) The institution files its application for approval of the proposed change, together with all required supporting documentation, at least 30 days prior to the expected effective date of the change. DEAC staff reviews the application for completeness and requests additional information from the institution as appropriate.
- 2) The Commission reviews the application and makes a decision whether or not to grant approval of the proposed change, request additional information, defer, or to deny the institution's request. A decision to deny the request may be appealed by the institution.
- 3) If the application is approved, DEAC may require an on-site visit to occur within six to twelve months following the expected date of implementation of the change to ensure the change, as implemented, did not detrimentally impact the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. In such cases, the institution submits at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site evaluation a report on the effect of the substantive change on the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards together with any supporting documentation required by the report.
- 4) The institution receives a copy of the Chair's Report setting forth the findings of the on-site evaluation team and is afforded 30 days in which to respond to such report. The response may include such additional data, information, materials, and supporting documentation as the institution deems relevant.
- 5) The Commission reviews the substantive change Record, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards following implementation of the substantive change, or takes action in accordance with Section X. In either case, DEAC sends a letter to the institution, within 30 days following the Commission's decision that notifies them of the decision and sets forth the basis for the same. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

A. Change of Core Mission or Objectives

1. An institution seeking to substantively depart from its core mission or objectives requires prior approval because the institution's accreditation is predicated on its core mission.
2. A significant alteration in the institution's core mission or objectives signals a change throughout the institution. Accordingly, in reviewing an institution's proposed change in its core mission or objectives, the Commission will be evaluating the institution's application based on a demonstration that the institution's proposed change is supported by its operations and infrastructure and is otherwise in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.
3. An institution seeking approval for a change in its core mission or objectives follows the standard substantive change process.

B. Change of Name

1. An institution seeking to change its name is required to obtain approval from the Commission before adopting the new name. The Commission determines whether the proposed new name will have an adverse or misleading effect on public perception of the institution or the institution's capacity to meet DEAC accreditation standards. Institutions seeking a change of name to include "university" or "college" must have DEAC approval as a degree-granting institution.
2. An institution seeking approval for a change in its name follows the standard substantive change process.

C. Change in Legal Status, Form of Control, or Ownership of Institution:

Accreditation does not automatically transfer to an institution when all or a majority share of its interests are sold or when an institution is sold or changes its legal status. If the new ownership desires to continue the institution's accreditation, it must notify DEAC and receive DEAC approval before the change is made. Failure to obtain approval results in withdrawal of institutional accreditation as of the date the change of legal status, control, or ownership occurs.

1. Change in Legal Status Definition: A "**change in legal status**" is defined as a change in the legal definition of the company or corporation, which is typically defined by the state or United States government, such as changing from a for-profit to a nonprofit or from an S Corporation to an LLC.
2. Control Definition: "**Control**" is the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution. Examples of change of "form of control" are (1) the sale of all or majority interest of the institution's assets, (2) sale or assignment of the controlling interest of the voting stock of a corporation that owns the institution or that controls the institution through one or more subsidiaries, (3) merger or consolidation of the institution with other institutions, or (4) an independent corporation owning an institution that becomes a subsidiary of another

corporation with a different ownership. When an institution changes its form of control, as defined as the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution, it is essentially changing ownership.

3. Change of Ownership Definition: A “**change of ownership**” is any transaction or combination of transactions that would result in a change in the control of an accredited institution.
4. A proposed transfer of ownership is approved based on the new owners, governing board members, and administrators possessing the capacity to own and operate a DEAC-accredited institution. The new ownership’s financial condition includes sufficient resources to continue sound institutional operations in fulfillment of all commitments to enrolled students. The financial stability allows the institution to remain in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.
5. The institution’s proposed new 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 proposed new owners, board members, officials, and executive staff are free from any association with misfeasance, including any government enforcement action, owning, managing, or controlling any educational institutions that entered into bankruptcy or closed, to the detriment of the students.
6. An institution authorized for and participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs assumes the responsibility of ensuring timely notification and submission of reports to DEAC to facilitate a seamless transfer of ownership and continuation of institutional eligibility. The Change of Legal Status, Control, or Ownership Report requires that copies of filings and submissions to the U.S. Department of Education be included, along with any correspondence received from the Department. The U.S. Department of Education has time-sensitive regulations regarding change of legal status, control, or ownership for institutions participating in federal student aid programs.
7. An institution seeking approval for a change legal status, form of control, or ownership follows the standard substantive change process. Without limiting the foregoing, the institution must notify DEAC in writing within 10 days following the effective date of its change in legal status, form of control, or ownership and receive an on-site evaluation within six months of the transaction closing.

D. Change of Location

1. An institution seeking a change of location (however close to the original site) is required to obtain prior approval from DEAC staff.
2. The institution provides evidence that it has state approval for the activity that it

conducts at the new location.

3. An institution seeking approval for a change in location follows the standard substantive change process.

E. **New Administrative Site**

1. **Administrative Site Definition:** An “administrative site” is a separate physical facility located geographically apart from the main headquarters location where the institution maintains managerial and support activities in areas such as budget and finance, information technology, human resources, marketing, or legal counsel. Neither educational programs nor instructional services to students are offered from an administrative site. Administrative sites are not listed in DEAC’s Directory of Accredited Institutions. The institution provides evidence that it has state approval for all the activities that it conducts at the administrative site.
2. An institution seeking approval for a new administrative site follows the standard substantive change process.

F. **Change in Educational Offerings**

The following are considered substantive changes to educational offerings. DEAC expects that proposed programs are developed and ready for implementation at the time of the request. If an in-residence component is included in the instructional design of a new program, the institution must follow the Addition of an In-Residence Training Component substantive change.

1. **Addition of a New Degree Program in a Related Field:** This involves any addition of a new degree program in a related field of study consistent with the educational offerings reviewed when the institution was last evaluated. This substantive change also includes the addition of a concentration or major to an existing program when unique program outcomes are distinctly related to the additional field of study.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new degree program in a related field of study:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the application and selects approximately 25 percent of courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Part Two, Section V. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution must submit the courses within 60 days otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. Submit a degree program educational offerings report, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-

site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards.

- c. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

2. Addition of a New Related-Field Non-Degree Program or Vocational

Program: This involves any addition of a new non-degree program or vocational program in a related field of study consistent with the educational offerings reviewed when the institution was last evaluated.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new non-degree program or vocational program in a related field:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. The institution must submit the program curriculum within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site specialist review fee.
- b. Submit a non-degree educational offerings report. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards.
- c. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the application. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

3. Change in Method of Delivery: This involves any change in method of delivery from when the institution was last evaluated.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for a change in method of delivery:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. The institution must submit the program curriculum within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

- b. Submit a degree or non-degree educational offerings report and access to one completed program for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards.
 - c. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.
4. **Contracting for Educational Delivery:** Substantive change requirements for an institution that contracts with an unaccredited organization or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV HEA programs to provide more than 25 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs are applicable to:
- an accredited institution that enters into a contract with another accredited organization or unaccredited entity to provide more than 25 percent up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs, or
 - an institution certified to participate in Title IV HEA programs that enters into a contract with an institution or organization not certified to participate in Title IV programs to provide more than 25 percent up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs

The process for obtaining DEAC approval for contracting for educational delivery with an unaccredited organization or organization not certified to participate in Title IV HEA programs requires the Commission to approve both the proposed contract for services and the curriculum which the proposed contract is intended to cover. The Commission must approve the contract for services before it will review the curriculum proposed within the contract for educational delivery. Both the contract approval and the curriculum approval must be granted before the Commission will grant approval for the institution's entry into the contract. The process is as follows:

- a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application. The Commission reviews the application and all documentation submitted to date and may approve, defer or deny the application to contract with a third party for educational delivery. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action.
- b. Contingent upon receiving approval of the contract, the institution submits a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the applications and selects the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a

letter indicating the courses required for submission based on the selection criteria in accordance with DEAC procedures for curriculum review. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

- c. The institution submits a degree or non-degree program educational offerings report, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 30 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards.
 - d. Upon receipt of the record submitted with respect to the curriculum, the Commission may approve, defer, or deny the curriculum proposed for the contract for educational delivery. If the Commission approves the curriculum and, provided that no intervening circumstances have occurred since the Commission's approval of the contract which might require a re-evaluation of the same, the Commission will grant final approval for the proposed substantive change. (Examples of such intervening circumstances may include but are not limited to the introduction of new information relating to either the accredited institution or the unaccredited institution which raise questions as to whether either or both can fulfill the proposed contract, a significant change in enrollment by the accredited institution, or another material event occurring with respect to the accredited institution.)
 - e. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.
5. **Contracting for Educational Delivery with an Approved AQC Provider:**
Upon Commission approval, an institution seeking to improve or expand its educational offerings to students can enter into an agreement to incorporate or contract for educational delivery up to 50 percent of its curriculum with an approved AQC or Approved Quality Curriculum provider.

An institution seeking to contract 26 percent to 50 percent of its curriculum for educational delivery with an approved AQC provider follows the steps below.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for contracting for educational delivery:

- a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application indicating the contracted courses selected and additional supporting documentation. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. The Commission reviews all documentation submitted to date and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards.

DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action.

6. **Addition of a New Degree Program in an Unrelated Field:** This involves any addition of a new degree program in an unrelated field of study not currently approved within the institution's scope of accreditation.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new degree program in an unrelated field of study:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the application and selects fifty percent of the courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Section V. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution must submit the courses within 60 days otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
 - b. Submit a Degree Educational Offerings Report, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the new degree program.
 - c. Post-Approval On-Site Visit: The institution receives an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new degree program and enrolling students to ensure ongoing compliance with DEAC standards. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.
 - d. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.
7. **Addition of a New Program in an Unrelated-Field for a Non-Degree Program or Vocational Program:** This involves any addition of a new non-degree program or vocational program in an unrelated field of study not currently approved within the institution's scope of accreditation.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new non-degree program or vocational program in an unrelated field of study:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution must submit the program curriculum within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the subject specialist review fee.
 - b. Submit a Non-degree Educational Offerings Report. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The Commission reviews the report and, upon approval, provides notification to the institution within 30 days, permitting enrollment into the non-degree program or vocational course.
 - c. Post-Approval On-Site Visit: At the discretion of the Commission, the institution may receive an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new non-degree program or vocational program and enrolling students. If the Commission requires the visit, the institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.
 - d. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.
8. **Addition of a Program at a Different Degree or Credential Level:** This involves any addition of a program at a degree or credential level different from the educational offerings currently included in the institution's scope of accreditation.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a program at a degree or credential level different from the educational offerings currently included in the institution's scope of accreditation:

- a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the application and selects approximately fifty percent of the courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Section V. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution must submit the courses within 60 days otherwise the application

may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

- b. Submit a Degree Educational Offerings Report, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards.
- c. The Commission reviews the report and, upon approval, provides notification to the institution within 30 days, permitting enrollment into the program.
- d. **Post-Approval On-Site Visit:** The institution receives an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new program and enrolling students. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.
- e. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

G. Academic Units of Measurement

1. Institutions may define their programs in terms of credit hours or clock hours and thereby adopt a common classification system that is understood and recognized by the higher education community.
2. **Significant Increase or Decrease in Clock or Credit Hours:** The alteration of a course or program that represents significant modification in the objectives or content of an approved course or program is considered a substantive change. As a general rule, this means any increase or decrease in clock or credit hours of an existing course/program from the original date of course/program approval, the date of approval of a previous substantive change to the course/program, or the most recent grant of accreditation.
3. **Changing from Clock to Credit Hours:** An institution changing an educational offering from clock to credit hours is a substantive change.
4. **Changing the Way an Institution Measures Student Progress:** This includes whether the institution measures progress in clock hours or credit-hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters or uses time-based or non-time-based methods.

These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for these substantive changes:

- a. Submit Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the application and selects approximately 25 percent of the educational content that the institution has selected to convert from clock hours to credit hours or to change in how it measures student progress.
- b. The institution's application and course/program documentation are submitted to an off-site subject specialist for review. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee. The institution receives an off-site subject specialist report and has 90 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards.
- c. The Commission reviews all documentation submitted to date and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

H. Addition of an In-Residence Program Component

1. This substantive change applies when the fulfillment of the learning outcomes of a course/program requires in-person delivery of curriculum, learning of certain manual skills, familiarity with specialized equipment, access to learning resources, or the application of certain techniques under professional supervision. DEAC reviews the Addition of an In-Residence Program Application and evaluates how the residential component complements, enhances, and applies the knowledge acquired from the approved courses for the program.
2. An institution seeking approval for a new in-residence program component follows the standard substantive change process.

I. Addition of a New Division

1. Adding a new division under a parent institution that establishes an identity and program offerings in a subject area or a number of related subject areas that are different from those offered by the parent institution is a substantive change.
2. These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:
 - a. Submit an Application for a New Division, including required documentation, 30 days prior to the proposed change. The completed application and

documentation are presented to the Commission for approval.

- b. Identify the programs that are proposed for the new division by submitting the Application for a Change in Educational Offerings.
- c. Post-Approval On-Site Report and Visit. Once the new division and program(s) are implemented, the institution submits a streamlined SER five weeks prior to the on-site visit.
- d. The institution receives an on-site visit within six months to one year after implementing the new division and enrolling students. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.
- e. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the substantive change record, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution remains in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

J. Engaging in Federal Student Assistance Title IV Programs

The following procedures and guidance are applicable to institutions which seek to participate in or are already participating in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs. The procedures and guidelines below are aligned with but do not replace the published federal requirements for participation in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs. Where a DEAC requirement is more stringent than a corresponding federal requirement, the institution should comply with the DEAC requirement. In no event, however, should institutions comply with a DEAC requirement if such compliance would make the institution non-compliant with a federal requirement; any institution encountering such a potential conflict should promptly notify DEAC's Director of Accreditation.

- 1. DEAC limits the percentage of revenue received from federal student assistance programs in the first year of authorized participation and requires the adoption of FSA default reduction methods at inception of participating in Title IV programs. DEAC conducts additional oversight of student loan default levels of any institution that, in any published cohort year, has a cohort default rate greater than 30 percent. The DEAC's requirements are more stringent than the published federal policies, giving DEAC additional insight into the institutions it accredits that participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs.
- 2. It is DEAC's expectation that any accredited institution electing to participate in

FSA Title IV programs will comply with all federal program responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, as amended, without exception.

3. For each institution that elects to participate in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs, DEAC examines (a) the record of the institution's compliance with its federal program responsibilities under FSA Title IV regulations, based on the most recent "official cohort default rates" published by the U.S. Department of Education; (b) the results of its audited financial statements; and (c) the institution's compliance audits, any program reviews conducted by the US Department of Education, and any other information that the U.S. Department of Education may provide to DEAC. DEAC takes action, as appropriate, when any of the information suggests that the institution may be failing to meet DEAC's standards.
4. An institution jeopardizes its accredited status with DEAC if it is found by DEAC or the appropriate federal authorities or a relevant state authority to be in significant noncompliance with its FSA Title IV program responsibilities or requirements.
5. **Scope of Activity:** The institution may elect to become an FSA Title IV program eligible institution and not participate in any Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs. Any programs selected for FSA Title IV program participation must meet the federal minimum requirements for program eligibility, as well as meeting DEAC's requirements. (Note: The U.S. Department of Education considers an eligible institution to be the "sum of its eligible programs.")
6. **Eligibility:** The institution that uses, or seeks to use, accreditation by DEAC to establish eligibility to participate in FSA Title IV programs must first offer "distance education" courses as defined under the formal definition established by the U.S. Department of Education.

Any programs the institution selects to be FSA Title IV program eligible must have been offered in substantially the same length, covering substantially the same subject matter, during the 24 months prior to the date the institution applies for Title IV eligibility certification from DEAC.

Any DEAC institution that intends to seek certification of Title IV eligibility from DEAC must meet all eligibility requirements, including the minimum program length requirements, expressed in weeks and academic credits, as set forth in the law and regulations for FSA Title IV program participation.

7. **Academic Units of Measurement:** DEAC reviews the institution's policies and procedures for determining the credit hours as defined in 34 CFR 600.2. DEAC evaluates the process an institution uses to award credits for courses and programs and makes a reasonable determination whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practices in higher education.

8. **Licensure:** The institution that uses, or seeks to use, accreditation by DEAC to establish eligibility to participate in FSA Title IV programs must have a charter, license, or formal authority from all appropriate government bodies to offer its programs or courses, when such authority is available or required. The loss of state licensure or required authority to operate results in the simultaneous loss of DEAC accreditation and Title IV eligibility.
9. **Limit on Participation and Significant Growth Triggers:** Revenue from all FSA Title IV programs by eligible institutions may not account for more than 50 percent of an institution's total revenue during its first 12 months of eligibility for FSA Title IV program participation, and not more than 75 percent of its revenue for all subsequent years of participation until such time that the institution (a) receives renewal of accreditation while participating in Title IV programs and (b) demonstrates that its three-year cohort default rate and financial statement composite score fall within acceptable ranges as prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education. Once the institution documents it meets the aforementioned requirements it may submit a request for the Commission's approval to exceed 75 percent of its revenue from FSA Title IV programs. The Commission, at its next scheduled regular meeting, will consider this record and the institution's ongoing compliance with accreditation standards and determine whether to approve the institution to draw the maximum revenue from FSA Title IV programs allowed under applicable Title IV regulations. Institutions must report the percentage of revenues derived from Title IV funds to DEAC using the same calculation methodology that is used when reporting revenues derived from Title IV funds to the U.S. Department of Education and as presented in the Title IV compliance audit.

Revenues received from students who enrolled in an institution's programs prior to the date on which FSA Title IV program eligibility was granted and who subsequently elect to receive FSA Title IV funds will not be included in the institution's FSA Title IV program revenues.

An institution that, due to its participation in FSA Title IV programs, experiences annual growth of more than a 50 percent increase in student enrollments and/or has more than a 50 percent increase in annual tuition receipts in any calendar year may be directed to undergo an on-site evaluation, at the discretion of the Commission.

10. **Certification of the Institution by DEAC:** An institution seeking to participate in FSA Title IV programs is required to be certified by DEAC prior to applying to the U.S. Department of Education. Violation of any provisions of these procedures, including applying to the U.S. Department of Education without first seeking and receiving DEAC certification, may subject an institution to corrective action, special visit, or loss of accreditation.

These are the steps for requesting Commission approval and certification to participate in FSA Title IV programs:

- a. A key person from the institution attends the DEAC *Title IV Financial Aid Seminar*. The institution then submits an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Application.
 - b. The institution must then submit an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Report that identifies programs intended for participation in FSA Title IV programs.
 - c. The institution receives an on-site visit to verify its compliance with federal minimum requirements and DEAC standards and procedures. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.
 - d. The Commission reviews the evaluation files for the institution's application for Title IV eligibility certification and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.
11. An institution participating in FSA Title IV programs must pay particular attention to documenting and demonstrating compliance with the following federal requirements.
- a. **Mission:** The institution's educational offerings are in a field of study in which the institution demonstrates competence.
 - b. **Satisfactory Academic Progress:** The institution implements and publishes a satisfactory academic progress policy that complies with all Federal Student Assistance Title IV program requirements as stated in current federal regulations.
 - c. **Regular and Substantive Interaction:** The institution implements policies and procedures that assure regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty in accordance with the federal definition of distance education (see 34 CFR 600 and 34 CFR 668). The institution maintains records to document that appropriate interactions occur throughout the student's enrollment.
 - d. **Competency-Based or Direct Assessment Programs:** The institution must seek prior approval for every competency-based or direct assessment program, as well as for every concentration of each competency-based or direct assessment program. These programs are subject to the federal definition of distance education that requires substantial interaction between students and faculty. The competencies established for such programs build a unified body of knowledge

that is consistent with a discipline or profession. Institutions applying for prior approval use the relevant Change in Educational Offerings application form.

- e. **Career and Financial Aid Advising:** The institution makes available to students, upon request, career advising related to their program of study. The institution makes available financial aid advising to all students in need of financial assistance, students that are applying for financial assistance, and other persons seeking additional information regarding the process for applying for and receiving federal student assistance. Such advising may take place via a variety of media sources and communication methods. Upon request of the student, the institution provides personal assistance on questions related to the application and delivery of financial aid.
- f. **Entrance and Exit Loan Advising:** The institution conducts entrance and exit loan advising that encourages loan repayment. The institution, through the financial aid office and the use of available media, encourages repayment of any FSA student loan funds that were obtained for payment of the tuition and other costs associated with the student's attendance and enrollment in the institution's educational offerings.
- g. **Disclosures:** Any statements the institution makes in any advertising, promotional literature, or other materials are complete and accurate about (1) its eligibility for or participation in FSA Title IV programs, (2) its efforts to become certified to participate in such programs, and/or (3) the availability of FSA Title IV benefits to students who enroll at the institution. The institution will not use the availability of FSA Title IV funds to students as the primary inducement or rationale for students to enroll in a program.

All promotional literature, catalogs, websites, or other materials that describe the financial assistance available to students, including any FSA Title IV funds that might be available, must state that the assistance is available only to those students who qualify and must include the federal and institutional requirements that students must meet in order to qualify and maintain eligibility for such assistance.

The institution discloses accurate course material information, including ISBN and retail prices. The institution's textbook pricing policy for new or used textbooks is fair to students.

- h. **Recruitment Personnel:** Institutional personnel involved in the recruitment of students as their principal activity do not have final decision-making authority in the approval or awarding of FSA Title IV funds. An institution that participates in FSA Title IV programs is aware of, and complies with, all U.S. Department of Education regulations and restrictions on methods of compensation that pertain directly or indirectly to success in student recruiting or admissions activities or in

making financial aid decisions.

- i. **Refund Policy:** The institution has and implements a fair and equitable refund policy in compliance with state requirements or, in the absence of such requirements, in accordance with DEAC's refund policy standards. The institution discloses the date from which refunds are calculated (e.g., the date of determination of withdrawal or termination). The institution complies first with the Return of Title IV requirements when a student who is an FSA Title IV recipient withdraws from an institution.
- j. **Federal Student Assistance Administrator:** The institution employs a capable individual(s) responsible for administering all FSA Title IV programs in which it participates and for coordinating those programs with the institution's other financial assistance programs. The institution employs other individuals, as needed, to assist in the administration of FSA Title IV programs.
- k. **Default Management Plan:** The institution's default management plan addresses student loan information (borrower's rights and responsibilities, information regarding repayment and consolidation of student loan debt, communications with lenders and loan servicing agents, and the consequences of default), advising and monitoring, cooperation with lenders, and collecting information to facilitate location of borrowers. The institution documents implementation of the default management program and regularly conducts an evaluation of the effectiveness of its efforts as part of its self-study program.

The published cohort rate for the institution for any cohort year—where 30 or more borrowers enter repayment—cannot exceed the allowable rate as prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education. Institutions that receive a published rate greater than 25 percent are required to implement and adhere to a default reduction plan that specifically outlines the means by which the institution will provide services and contacts to the borrowers in an attempt to reduce the cohort default rate.

- l. **Financial Responsibility:** The institution meets the financial responsibility and administrative capability rules for federal financial aid participation, including the annual submission of audited comparative financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years, auditor opinion and management letters, and composite score calculation.
- m. **Program Reviews:** The institution notifies DEAC in writing within 10 days of having undergone any program reviews, inspections, or other reviews of its participation in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs by the U.S. Department of Education. The institution also provides complete copies of any reports (both preliminary and final) of these reviews and provides any available compliance audits within 10 days of its receipt of these documents.

- n. **Bankruptcy:** An institution that files for federal bankruptcy protection simultaneously and immediately forfeits its DEAC-accredited status and Federal Student Assistance Title IV program eligibility.
- o. **Renewal of Accreditation:** Since the length of the FSA Title IV programs certification extends only through the institution's current term of accreditation, the institution must renew its compliance with FSA Title IV programs as part of its renewal of accreditation. The institution must readdress the FSA Title IV statements in its Self-Evaluation Report. During the on-site evaluation, an evaluator with expertise in FSA Title IV programs verifies the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report.

K. Engaging in International Activities

- 1. An institution seeking to add active international functions (e.g., training sites, recruiting, instruction, marketing, business) outside the United States, add coordinating offices in another country, or contract with foreign agents or educational entities is required to obtain prior approval from the Commission.
- 2. An accredited institution offering educational programs outside of its home country must obtain all appropriate external approvals where required, including higher education system administration, and relevant government bodies. The institution documents the accepted legal basis for its operation in the host country and meets legal requirements of the host country.
- 3. An institution seeking approval to engage in international activities follows the standard substantive change process.

XX. NON-SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

Non-substantive changes are those changes that require review and confirmation by DEAC staff prior to implementation but do not require prior approval by the Commission as is the case for substantive changes. Institutions submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing any required documentation or information. Upon review of the non-substantive change request, DEAC may determine that certain characteristics in the change require that the institution undertake additional reporting obligations and/or a site visit following implementation of the change in order to ensure that the change did not have a detrimental impact on the institution's students, its compliance with DEAC accreditation standards, and its adherence to its educational mission. The Non-Substantive Change Request Form and associated fees information can be found on the DEAC website. The following are non-substantive changes:

- A. **Change of President/Chief Executive Officer:** When an institution makes a change in its president/CEO, defined as the replacement of the senior-level executive of the institution since the last accreditation evaluation, it must immediately notify DEAC in

writing. The institution must submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form and a letter providing a full explanation of when the change of president/CEO is being made, why it is being made, and how the change will affect the institution's capacity to continue to meet all DEAC accreditation standards.

The institution should also include documentation on the qualifications of the new president/CEO and a summary of the job description. The institution agrees that, as part of the change of president/CEO, the new president/CEO may be subject to a background check by DEAC, which may include, but not be limited to, DEAC surveys of state educational oversight agencies, federal departments and agencies, and consumer protection agencies, as well as looking at credit history, prior bankruptcy, criminal background, debarment from Federal Student Assistance Title IV Programs, closing of educational institutions in which they were managers or principals, or loss of accreditation or state approval to operate an educational institution. The costs and expenses of any such background check shall be the responsibility of the institution.

B. Program or Course Revisions: Institutions seeking to change the title, code, content, requirements, or structure of an existing program or course must submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing the requested information as outlined in the circumstances listed below:

1. **Program Title Revisions:** An institution that changes the title of a program without changing the instructional content, objectives, or courses comprising the program.
2. **Course Title Revisions:**-An institution that changes the title or code of a course without changing the instructional content or objectives of the course.

The institution submits a letter providing the reason for the change and certifies that the title or code changes are the only revisions to the program or course.

3. **Existing Program Revisions:** An institution that makes changes to the core course content, sequence, requirements, or structure of an existing program without substantively changing the outcomes.

The institution submits a letter providing the reason for the change, a curriculum map identifying and comparing the current and proposed program elements, and a statement certifying that the program remains aligned with its accredited scope.

4. **Adding a Specialization/Emphasis/Concentration to an Existing Program Comprised of Courses Already Approved:** Institutions may determine that it is appropriate to organize existing courses within an existing program into a specialization, emphasis, or concentration. The specialization, emphasis, or concentration does not introduce a new field of study or have unique program outcomes.

The institution submits a letter providing the rationale for the implementation; a curriculum map establishing the courses comprising the specialization/emphasis/concentration; and a statement certifying that the courses used to create the focus area are the same courses approved by DEAC as part of the approved program.

DEAC reserves the right to direct the institution to the substantive change process when it appears that the change notifications outlined above represent a significant departure from its accredited scope or from the content of the program or course at the time of its initial approval.

- C. **Certificate Program Containing Courses Already Approved:** Institutions may determine that it is appropriate to create a certificate program to meet a specific marketplace need comprised of existing, already approved courses. Courses comprising the new certificate program must be exactly the same (*e.g.*, require proctored exams, the same assignments, the same exams) as those offered in an already approved program and which would allow students to apply earned credits towards another program. The institution must submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing:

1. the rationale for the implementation;
2. a curriculum map outlining the scope and sequence of the courses for the certificate-level credential;
3. a description of program outcomes;
4. evidence that offering the certificate-level credential is aligned with industry requirements for entering or advancing in a profession; and
5. a statement certifying that the courses used to create the certificate program are the same courses included by DEAC as part of the institution's DEAC-approved program.

- D. **Changing General Education Requirements or Eliminating a Major Thesis Requirement:** An institution changing general education requirements or eliminating a major thesis requirement submits the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter outlining the change, the reason for the change, and certifying that these are the only revisions to the course or program.

- E. **Contracting for Educational Delivery with an Approved AQC Provider, Accredited Institution, or Other Entity:** An institution can enter into an agreement to contract for educational delivery of up to 25 percent of its curriculum with an Approved Quality Curriculum (AQC) provider, an accredited institution, an entity that does not have accreditation, or organization not certified to participate in Title IV HEA programs by submitting the Non-Substantive Change Request Form and a letter listing the acquired courses, the courses that will be replaced, the reason for the change, and the faculty

responsible for reviewing and providing instruction and certifying that these are the only revisions to the course or program.

DEAC reserves the right to direct the institution to the substantive change process when it appears that the contracting for educational delivery is not with an appropriately accredited institution.

- F. **Adding Courses:** If an institution adds courses similar to its existing educational offerings within its DEAC-accredited scope, it submits the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing the following information for each course:

- name and number of the course;
- number of credits awarded;
- core/elective designation;
- course description;
- faculty and their qualifications to teach the course (submit résumé or curriculum vitae); and
- a rationale for the addition that explains the alignment with existing programs and institutional mission.

DEAC expects that proposed courses are developed and ready for implementation at the time of the request.

- G. **Discontinuing Courses or Programs:** If an institution decides to discontinue a course or program, it submits the Non-Substantive Change Request Form and a letter explaining the reasons for the change. Programs being discontinued require the inclusion of a program teach-out plan and information on the number of currently enrolled students.

- H. **Division Identity:** Institutions seeking to organize existing programs into a division that that will continue to operate as part of the institution must submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing a complete description of how the institution will disclose the division as part of the broader educational offerings and clearly delineate the relationship between the division and the institution. Institutions seeking to add a division under a parent institution that establishes a discrete identity from the parent institution must apply for prior approval of a substantive change and submit the Application for a Division.

DEAC requires that any separately advertised division be listed in the DEAC Directory of Accredited Institutions.

- I. **Closure of an Administrative Site:** When an institution decides to close an administrative site, it submits (at least 30 days prior to the closure) the Non-Substantive Change Request Form and a letter providing the following information:

1. Name, address, and telephone number of the site.
2. The date and reason(s) for closing the administrative site.
3. Personnel names, titles, and job descriptions affected by the closing.
4. Information explaining what duties were carried out at the administrative site and where those duties will be carried out in the future.
5. Information on any significant changes in courses/programs or educational services, student support services, etc., resulting from the closure of the administrative site.
6. Information on changes to any advertising and promotional materials (including website) resulting from the closure of the administrative site.
7. If any official documents were kept at the administrative site, explain when and where the records will be transferred.
8. Evidence that the institution has properly notified the appropriate licensing, authorizing, or approving state educational agency concerning the closure of the administrative site.

XXI. TEACH-OUT PLANS

- A. Institutions must submit to DEAC for its approval a comprehensive, written teach-out plan (as defined in 34 CFR 600.2 and as further defined under subsection B below), for its enrolled students when any of the events listed below occur. In addition, and if practicable, the institution shall submit a teach-out agreement (as defined in 34 CFR 600.2 and as further defined under subsection C below) if any of the events described below occur:
 1. The U.S. Department of Education has notified DEAC of an action against the institution pursuant to Federal Regulations, Section 487 (f) [20 USC 1099 b], to include placing the institution on the reimbursement payment method under 34 CFR 668.162(c) or the heightened cash monitoring payment method requiring a review of the institution's supporting documentation under 34 CFR 668.162(d)(2).
 2. The U.S. Department of Education has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution's participation in any Title IV HEA program.
 3. The Secretary notifies the agency that the institution is participating in Title IV HEA programs under a provisional program participation agreement, and the Secretary has required a teach-out plan as a condition of participation.
 4. The U.S. Department of Education notifies DEAC of a determination by the institution's independent auditor expressing doubt about the institution's ability to operate as a going concern or indicating an adverse opinion or a finding of material weakness related to financial stability.
 5. DEAC has independently made a determination that the institution appears to lack sufficient financial resources to sustain effective operation in meeting obligations to students.
 6. The institution enters bankruptcy.
 7. DEAC has withdrawn accreditation from the institution.
 8. DEAC has directed the institution to show cause as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

9. A state licensing or authorizing agency notifies DEAC that the institution's license or legal authorization has been or will be revoked or that the state agency has sanctioned the institution for reasons relevant to the institution's continued compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.
 10. The institution has notified DEAC that it intends to cease operations.
- B. Teach-Out Plan:** At a minimum, the proposed teach-out plan must ensure that all students who are enrolled at the institution receive all of the training or education under the terms of their contracts, including receiving all learning materials and student services on a timely basis.
1. There are two approaches to teach-out plans:
 - a. The institution plans to teach-out its own students.
 - b. An executed teach-out agreement is in place with one or more appropriately accredited institutions currently offering programs similar to those offered at the closing institution.
 2. Minimum components for any teach-out plan:
 - a. A listing by name, student number, email address, and telephone number of all students in each program, the program requirements each student has completed, and their estimated completion/graduation dates.
 - b. The institution's financial obligations to each student, including without limitation, unearned tuition, all current refunds due, and account balances.
 - c. Academic programs offered by the institution and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach-out agreement with the institution.
 - d. Arrangements made for the secure safekeeping of all student records, including educational, accounting, and financial aid records, in a location that can be readily accessed by students (with respect to their own records), by DEAC, and by state and federal regulators, and otherwise in accordance with applicable legal requirements in the event the institution closes.
 - e. Without limiting the foregoing, the arrangement with a third-party repository for student transcripts from which students can obtain copies of their transcripts for a minimal fee.
 - f. Instructions on how curricula and learning management software may be accessed by students if the institution is conducting its own teach-out.
 - g. An explanation, accompanied by appropriate supporting documentation and timelines, of how the closing institution will notify students in the event of closure and, as applicable, how the closing institution will notify the students of their teach-out options and ability to transfer credits.
 - h. A copy of all notifications related to the institution's closure or to teach-out options to ensure that (i) the information accurately represents students' ability to transfer credits, and (ii) DEAC may require changes in the language of the notifications to correct, clarify, or otherwise amend representations in

the notification to the extent DEAC becomes aware of information which suggests such changes are advisable.

- i. For institutions offering hybrid programs (distance study and required face-to-face instruction), an explanation and evidence of how the teach-out institution has the capacity to provide the students with instruction and services without requiring the students to move or travel substantial distances from the closing institution, and evidence of the adequacy of the teach-out institution's facilities and equipment.
 - j. A statement showing evidence that state regulations regarding any student protection funds and/or bonds are followed, if applicable.
 - k. A statement that describes any additional charges/fees and notification to students about the charges/fees.
 - l. A description of what financial resources will be used to make student refunds or fund the teach-out.
 - m. A plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on state refund policies.
 - n. A record retention plan, to be provided to all enrolled students, that delineates the final disposition of teach-out records (e.g., student transcripts, billing, financial aid records).
 - o. Information on the number and types of credits the teach-out institution is willing to accept prior to the student's enrollment.
 - p. A clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.
 - q. The name, title, email address, telephone number, office address, and other relevant contact information for the person or persons who will act as the primary liaison(s) between the institution and DEAC throughout the period of the teach-out. Such information is to be updated as necessary through the teach-out period.
3. DEAC notifies the relevant accrediting agency of DEAC's approval or rejection of a teach-out plan that includes a program or institution accredited by such other agency. DEAC also notifies any state, federal or other agency or program which it has reason to believe may be affected by the teach-out plan.

C. Teach-Out Agreement: When a DEAC institution is required to submit a teach-out agreement under Section (A) above, the agreement must be approved by DEAC prior to implementation. DEAC approves teach-out agreements only if the agreement offers educational services consistent with DEAC accreditation standards and the institution's teach-out plan, satisfies the requirements of 34 CFR 600.2 and other state and federal regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students being served. Without limiting the foregoing, the teach-out institution, whether it is the institution submitting the plan or another institution providing the teach-out,

1. Must have the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, delivery modality, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations. However, while an option via an alternate method of delivery may be made available to students, such an option is not sufficient unless an option via the same method of delivery as the original educational program is also provided.
2. Must have the capacity to carry out its mission and meet all obligations to existing students.
3. Must demonstrate that it:
 - a. can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel for substantial distances or durations; and
 - b. will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

Without limiting the foregoing, the teach-out institution may not be an institution that itself has been or is required to submit a teach-out plan under Section A above or is under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.

The following elements are also considered in approving teach-out agreements:

1. The agreement is with one or more institutions accredited by an agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The institution is state- licensed and currently offers programs similar to those at the closing institution.
2. The agreement states that the student will be provided access to all the programs of instruction, without additional cost, that the student originally contracted and paid for but did not receive, due to the [pending] closure of the institution. For hybrid programs, the teach-out institution must be near the closing institution so that the students are not required to move or travel substantial distances.
3. The agreement clarifies the financial responsibilities of all parties, including the assumption of any liabilities for tuition refunds and appropriate notification to students in a timely manner of additional charges/fees, if any.
4. The agreement states whether, upon completion of the program, the student will receive a diploma, certificate, or degree from the teach-out institution or whether the diploma or certificate will be awarded by the closing institution.
5. The agreement indicates whether students who (a) had already enrolled but had not yet started their program of study at the closing institution or (b) are on a leave of absence from the closing institution, will be entitled to begin training or re-enroll at the teach-out institution.

6. The agreement states that the closing institution will provide the teach-out institution with copies of the following records for the students being taught out:
 - Enrollment agreements
 - Financial aid transcripts
 - Study/progress records
 - Academic transcripts
 - Student account records
 - Any relevant curricular materials
7. The agreement requires that the teach-out institution maintain records and documents for the students being taught out and that the teach-out institution will report to DEAC on a periodic basis on the status of the teach-out.
8. The agreement provides for appropriate notification to DEAC and federal and state authorities.

Notwithstanding the provisions in this section, DEAC may waive requirements regarding the percentage of credits that must be earned by a student at the institution awarding the educational credential if the student is completing his/her/their program through a written teach-out agreement or transfer. Factors DEAC would typically consider in granting any such waiver would include, without limitation, (1) the previous coursework completed by the student before the teach-out began, (2) whether the student had completed all core requirements for the educational credential, (3) non-academic experience of the student within the field covered by the educational credential, (4) the evaluation received by the student for the capstone project required for the credential, if applicable, (5) teacher and/or employer recommendations, (6) the student's grades in the applicable field, (7) whether the student completed coursework in an adjacent or connected field, and (8) hardship to the student if a waiver is not granted.

- D. **Closure Without Teach-Out Plan/Agreement:** If a DEAC-accredited institution closes without a teach-out plan/agreement or an institution refuses to provide a teach-out plan/agreement, DEAC will work with the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state agency, (and other regulatory, governmental, accrediting and educational entities as DEAC may deem appropriate in its discretion) to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

XXII. COMPLAINTS (ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS, ACTIVE APPLICANTS, AND DEAC)

- A. **Definition of Complaint:** A complaint is defined as a written notification to DEAC by any person or entity that sets forth reasonable and credible information that (1) an accredited institution; (2) an institution applying for accreditation; or (3) the evaluators, commissioners, or DEAC staff, are not in compliance with one or more of DEAC's

accreditation standards.

- B. Filing a Complaint with DEAC.** DEAC's Online Complaint System enables individuals to file a complaint directly using the DEAC website. The complaint form is found at www.deac.org/Student-Center/Complaint-Process.aspx. Written complaints will also be accepted by mail or other form of effective delivery to DEAC, provided they include (1) the complainant's name and contact information (2) the basis of any allegation of noncompliance with DEAC standards and procedures; (3) all relevant names and dates and a brief description of the actions forming the basis of the complaint; (4) copies of any available documents or materials that support the allegations; and (5) a release authorizing DEAC to forward a copy of the complaint, including identification of the complainant(s) to the institution.

In cases of anonymous complaints or where the complainant requests confidentiality, DEAC will consider whether the complainant's identity is necessary to investigate the complaint and provide due process to the institution, DEAC will (1) notify complainants who identify themselves to DEAC but request anonymity if DEAC believes that it cannot proceed with its investigation without revealing the complainant's name to the institution, the Commission, and other relevant entities and (2) wait for authorization from the complainant to waive anonymity before it takes further action. Notwithstanding the foregoing, to the extent that an anonymous complaint or a complaint filed where the complainant will not waive a request for anonymity raises material issues of compliance by a DEAC accredited institution, DEAC may initiate further fact-finding with respect to the allegations in the complaint.

C. Complaints Outside of DEAC Scope:

Where issues of educational services, student services, admissions decisions, assignment of grades or tuition are concerned, DEAC may refer the complainant to the institution to resolve and only if the institution is unable to resolve the same, will DEAC conduct its own investigation and seek resolution to the same. Where DEAC believes it is advisable or appropriate it may also refer the complaint and/or the complainant to a federal or state agency or private entity with jurisdiction over the subject matter of the complaint, any such determination will be made by DEAC in its sole discretion. Students filing complaints must confirm that they have exhausted the institution's complaint process prior to pursuing a complaint with DEAC or must explain to DEAC's reasonable satisfaction why pursuing the complaint through the institution's internal processes would be unavailing.

DEAC will not intervene on behalf of individuals in cases of a personnel action, nor will it review an institution's internal administrative decisions in such matters as admissions decisions, academic honesty, assignment of grades, and similar matters unless the context of an allegation suggests that unethical or unprofessional conduct or action may have occurred that might call into question the institution's compliance with a DEAC standard or policy.

Further, where the alleged circumstances giving rise to the complaint have occurred so long ago that (1) investigating and ascertaining the facts would be difficult, and (2) DEAC has reason to believe that the complaint alleges practices or actions which are no longer present at the institution, DEAC will so inform the complainant and will advise the complainant that, without further demonstration from the complainant that the allegations relating to the institution's compliance with DEAC standards are likely to be an ongoing threat to the institution's students, faculty or academic integrity, DEAC is unlikely to pursue the claim. Decisions made by DEAC in evaluating third party complaints shall be made in its sole discretion, consistent with the guidelines set forth above. A summary of DEAC's disposition of each complaint under this section is reported to the Commission for review and to take such further action as the Commission may deem appropriate.

- D. **Recordkeeping for Complaints:** Complaints received against accredited institutions and the manner of their resolution are kept for two accreditation cycles (8 to 10 years). Complaints received against initial applicants for accreditation are kept for three years. DEAC provides summaries of these files to visiting examining committees when they conduct on-site visits. DEAC also considers these summary files when it acts on an institution's application for initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.

New and/or open complaints are also tabulated and summarized and presented at each meeting of the Commission. The summary provides an analysis of any unresolved complaints, and any other information the Commission may request regarding the record of complaints received by DEAC.

E. **Complaints Against Accredited Institutions:**

DEAC expects its accredited institutions to have operational procedures in place for fairly and promptly resolving complaints filed against the institution by students, faculty, or the public. Therefore, in investigating a specific complaint against an accredited institution filed directly with DEAC, DEAC also examines whether or not the institution has effective methods for handling student, faculty, staff and educational problems on a routine basis and whether such methods are equitable, consistently applied, and effective in resolving problems.

DEAC is also concerned about the frequency and pattern of complaints about an accredited institution. DEAC expects the institution to monitor all complaints it receives and expects the institution to take steps to ensure that similar complaints do not become repetitive or routine. Institutions are required to maintain the complete files for every complaint for no less than the longer of five years or the completion of the institution's next reaccreditation evaluation cycle.

- F. **Action:** When DEAC receives a complaint against an applicant or accredited institution, the DEAC's procedure for handling the complaint consists of the following steps:

1. Within ten business days following-receipt of the complaint, DEAC will send a letter

or email to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the process that the DEAC will follow in investigating the complaint.

2. DEAC will complete an initial review of the complaint within fifteen business days following its receipt to determine whether it sets forth information or allegations that reasonably suggest that an institution may not be in compliance with DEAC's standards and procedures. If additional information or clarification is required, before DEAC believes it can pursue a further investigation of the complaint, DEAC will so notify the complainant and request the complainant provide the additional information. Failure of the complainant to provide such additional information may result in DEAC determining that the complaint cannot be effectively investigated.
3. If DEAC determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations do not reasonably demonstrate that an institution is out of compliance with DEAC standards or procedures or that the complainant has not provided sufficient information on which DEAC can evaluate it, the complaint will not be further investigated by DEAC and the complainant will be notified of such a disposition and the reasons.
4. If DEAC determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations reasonably suggest that an institution may not be in compliance with DEAC standards and procedures, the DEAC will provide a copy of the original complaint to the institution and direct the institution to provide a response to the complaint within 30 days following such notice with the following exceptions:
 - a. In cases of advertising violations, when DEAC staff forwards a copy of the advertisement at issue to the institution, citing the standard that might have been violated. The institution is required to respond within **15 days** of receiving such notice.
 - b. If a news article or media broadcast carries a negative report on a DEAC-accredited institution, or any of its owners, senior management, or executives, the institution is required to respond to the statement(s) within **15 days**.
 - c. In cases when the complaints are from students concerning administrative services, student services, educational services, or tuition, the institution will be required to respond directly to the student within **15 days** to address his/her concerns. The institution must also respond to DEAC within **15 days**; such response must include, at minimum, a copy of the response sent to the student.
 - d. The failure of the institution to provide either a response to the complaint or any additional information as requested by the executive director within the specified time frames will be considered a violation of DEAC's policy on complaints and will be referred to the Commission for consideration and action. The complainant will be notified when a request for a response from the institution has been delivered by DEAC.

5. If, following review of the institutional response to the complaint, DEAC concludes that the allegations in the complaint have been rebutted or resolved by the institution, the complainant and the institution will be notified of such resolution.
 6. On no less than a semi-annual basis, DEAC will provide the Commission with a list of all complaints closed by the executive director and a summary of the reasons for closing each such complaint. The Commission may, in its discretion, elect to reopen any such complaint for further investigation and resolution.
 7. If DEAC concludes following review of the institution's first response to the complaint, that the allegations may establish that there has been a violation of DEAC standards and/or procedures, DEAC may take one of the following actions:
 - a. Defer resolution on the complaint for a period not to exceed 60 days if there is evidence that the institution is making progress in rectifying the situation. Failure by the institution to rectify the situation by the end of the 60-day period will be referred to the Commission for consideration and action.
 - b. Notify the institution that, based on the information provided, one or more of the issues raised by the complaint has been referred to the Commission for further action.
 - c. The complainant will be informed of any deferral provided under this section and/or of whether any issues raised by the complaint have been referred to the Commission.
 8. DEAC will send a letter to the complainant and the institution regarding the final disposition of each complaint. A record of the complaint and associated documentation (including any institutional response and additional information provided by the institution or the complainant together with any materials prepared or collected by DEAC) is kept on file.
 9. An adverse action against an institution arising from a complaint will not be initiated until the institution has had an opportunity to respond to the complaint within the time frames set forth by DEAC.
- G. Complaints about Applicant Institutions:** If DEAC receives a complaint about an applicant institution, it is treated as a third-party comment pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section VII.

H. Complaints About DEAC Evaluators, Commissioners, and Staff:

The Board of Directors is responsible for handling complaints against DEAC evaluators, Commissioners, and/or staff for alleged violations of DEAC's standards, policies, or code of conduct. Any member of the Board who is the subject of or implicated by the allegations in

the complaint must recuse from all discussions, deliberations and decision-making with respect to any such complaint. The process followed for such complaints is as follows:

1. After the receipt of the complaint by DEAC, all materials related to the complaint are forwarded to the Chair of the Executive Committee (unless the complaint is about the chair). If the complaint is about the Chair, the complaint and all materials are forwarded to the Vice Chair.
2. After the receipt of the complaint, the Chair or Vice Chair sends a letter to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the process the DEAC will follow in investigating the complaint. The Chair or Vice Chair also forwards a copy of the complaint to the person(s) named in the same. The identity of the complainant(s) may be withheld in the Chair's or Vice Chair's sole discretion. The Chair or Vice Chair may also elect, in their discretion, to send only a summary of the allegations in the complaint rather than the actual complaint. The person(s) named in the complaint is asked to respond to the same (or the summary of the same) in writing within **30 days**.
3. The Chair or Vice Chair also decides whether any additional information is needed from the complainant or regarding the subject of the complaint, before the complaint can be considered. If so, the Chair or Vice Chair requests that DEAC obtain the information within **30 days**. If the requested information is not received within the specified time frame, the Chair or Vice Chair may determine that there is insufficient information to pursue the complaint further; any such determination will be communicated to the complainant. If the requested information is not received from the subject of the complaint, the matter will be referred to the Board for further action. DEAC employees may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. DEAC consultants, contractors and volunteers may, as applicable, have their contracts terminated and/or their names removed from the pool of potential volunteers retained by DEAC in connection with the accreditation process. Directors and Commissioners may be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including removal from office.
4. Within **30 days** of receipt of all the information pertaining to the complaint, including the original complaint and any additional information, provided by the Complainant and/or the subject(s) of the Complaint and/or otherwise assembled by DEAC staff (such materials, as they may be supplemented or revised from time to time, the "complaint file"), the Chair or Vice Chair convenes a conference call of the Executive Committee to review the complaint.
5. After review of the complaint file the Executive Committee summarizes its findings and presents them to the full Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting, unless an earlier special meeting is requested by the Executive Committee in its sole discretion. The Board will then consider the complaint file, together with the analysis and recommendations of the Executive Committee. The Board may at that point reach a final decision with respect to the resolution of the complaint or may elect to defer that decision if it believes more information is required in order to reach a fully considered and fair

decision. If the Board requires additional information, it will work with DEAC staff to use good faith efforts to collect such information within **30 days**. Both the complainant and the subject of the Complaint will be kept informed of the Board's actions.

6. If the Board determines that there has been a violation of DEAC standards, policies, or code of conduct by a DEAC employee or contractor, director, evaluator or other affiliated person, the Board will take such disciplinary action as it deems appropriate, up to and including termination. DEAC consultants, contractors and volunteers may, as applicable, have their contracts terminated and/or their names removed from the pool of potential volunteers retained by DEAC in connection with the accreditation process. Directors and Commissioners may be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including removal from office. The Board may also refer the complaint to third parties for further action.
7. The Chair or Vice Chair notifies the person named in the complaint of the Board's decision within **30 days**.
8. The Chair or Vice Chair notifies the complainant of the final disposition of the complaint within **30 days** after such disposition has been determined by the Board.

A record of the complaint file, the Board's decision, and the notice sent to the complainant with respect to the same are, kept on file at the DEAC offices in accordance with document retention policies and procedures.

XXIII. REVIEWING, ADOPTING, AND CIRCULATING CHANGES TO THE ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

- A. The Commission has the power and responsibility to review, establish, and circulate its standards and procedures for evaluation and accreditation of distance education institutions.
- B. **Origin of Accreditation Standards and Procedures:** The Commission considers recommendations from any source and in any manner or form when reviewing its accreditation standards and procedures. The following is a list of some sources of recommendations for new or amended accreditation standards and procedures:
 1. **Commission:** The Commission reviews its accreditation standards and procedures and any comments received at every meeting.
 2. **DEAC Staff:** The DEAC staff make recommendations and suggestions to the Commission regarding any accreditation standards or procedures that it believes need to be strengthened.
 3. **Board Sub-Committee:** The Standards Committee, from time to time, makes recommendations to the Commission to refine and/or revise standards to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of students and member institutions.

4. **DEAC Evaluators and Subject Specialists:** All DEAC evaluators and subject specialists are surveyed after each review and on-site visit to seek recommendations for clarifying accreditation standards and improving procedures.
 5. **State Regulators:** DEAC invites a representative from the state regulator's office where the institution is located to observe on-site visits and provide feedback on DEAC accreditation standards and procedures.
 6. **Government and Nongovernmental Agencies:** Input and changes from the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) inform revisions to DEAC accreditation standards and procedures.
 7. **Educators, Faculty, and Administrators:** Education industry professionals provide recommendations for revisions to DEAC accreditation standards and improvements to procedures based on best practices.
 8. **Consumer Groups:** DEAC periodically interacts with consumer protection groups (e.g., Better Business Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) to seek suggestions for improvement of accreditation standards and procedures.
 9. **Applicant and Accredited Institutions:** Each applicant and member institution is encouraged to provide thoughtful feedback and suggestions for clarification and revision of DEAC accreditation standards and procedures for continuous improvement.
 10. **Third-Party Review:** DEAC periodically retains an independent organization to review its accreditation standards and procedures and to conduct rigorous validity and reliability surveys.
 11. **Students and the General Public:** DEAC seeks input and feedback from students through surveys. Student complaints and correspondence are responded to by DEAC staff and used during reviews of accreditation standards and procedures.
- C. **Systematic Program Review:** DEAC seeks input and collects data from its communities of interest, including internal and external constituencies. DEAC uses these data when evaluating and drafting changes to its accreditation standards and procedures. DEAC performs a systematic review of its accreditation standards and procedures using comments, recommendations, and data collected from various sources. Elements of the systematic review process include the following:
1. Every five years, DEAC engages an independent, third-party organization to survey accredited institutions, DEAC evaluators (e.g., faculty from appropriately accredited institutions recognized by the U.S. Department of Education), subject specialists, and students (e.g., active, graduates, inactive, and withdrawn) on the validity and reliability of DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures. These surveys focus on the adequacy and relevance of the accreditation standards and their effectiveness in

enabling DEAC to evaluate the quality of distance education. The third-party organization evaluates DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures individually and as a whole.

2. The DEAC Board Standards Committee collects feedback from member institutions and other interested constituencies as part of the review process. The committee may create as special task forces to address the evaluation of the information and determine whether current accreditation standards or procedures need revision. The Standards Committee meets twice a year at the DEAC Annual Conference and Fall Workshop and at such other times as may be requested by DEAC and/or the Commission.
3. DEAC staff propose revisions to accreditation standards and procedures to ensure continued compliance with recognition criteria from the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
4. Interested constituencies, institutions, and organizations are continuously encouraged to submit comments and recommendations for revision of current accreditation standards and procedures. Comments and recommendations are sent to DEAC's executive director.

D. Processes and Procedures for Adoption of Changes to the *Accreditation*

Handbook: The following process is followed for adopting revisions to DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures.

1. All recommendations for revisions to current accreditation standards and procedures are collected by DEAC staff and submitted to the Standards SubCommittee for initial review. The Standards SubCommittee proposes revised language or develops new accreditation standards or procedures based on the feedback received. Once the Standards SubCommittee reviews the proposed language, it is forwarded to the Commission for review. The Commission considers the recommendations and reviews the proposed language and either approves the changes as proposed or makes revisions and then approves the revised language.
2. Upon Commission approval of the revised accreditation standards or procedures, the proposed language is sent to member institutions, the public, and other stakeholders for comment. Comments are solicited within an established time frame (usually 30 days). A notice is posted on DEAC's website to allow the general public to review and comment on the proposed changes. DEAC encourages all internal and external communities of interest, including those that have made their interest known, to comment on any proposed changes.
3. The Commission reviews and carefully considers all comments before making a final decision. The Commission can adopt accreditation standards and procedures as proposed, adopt with changes or modifications, defer action until further study

and consideration can be had, or reject the proposed changes outright. Once changes to accreditation standards or procedures are finalized, the revised standards are published as provided under Section E below. Institutions are provided a reasonable period in which to comply with the same when appropriate.

4. If exigent circumstances exist that necessitate a material change to DEAC accreditation standards or procedures to become final and effective immediately, the Commission publishes the change in final form without regard to the notice and comment procedures stated in II.6. Interested parties are provided an opportunity to comment on the change as soon as practicable after publication. Examples of exigent changes which might require such immediate action include, but are not limited to: (a) immediate changes to DEAC policies, procedures and standards required by other accrediting organizations; (b) legal or regulatory changes with effective dates that do not support the standard comment period; and (c) external causes (such as pandemics, infrastructure/communication issues, or domestic/international conflicts).
 5. Non-substantive changes to DEAC's standards, policies and procedures may be adopted by the Commission without a notice or comment period. However, they are published by DEAC in accordance with subsection E below. Non-substantive changes include, by way of example, changes which are intended (i) to clarify and/or provide greater detail with respect to existing provisions, (ii) to improve readability, (iii) to conform terminology, and (iv) to update names, addresses and administrative information.
- E. Circulation of Accreditation Standards and Procedures:** DEAC circulates the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures following the processes below:
1. New or revised accreditation standards or procedures are posted on DEAC's website and published in DEAC publications that are sent to all internal and external constituencies.
 2. The following DEAC publications are updated to include the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.
 - a. The *Accreditation Handbook* is made available on the DEAC website. Printed copies are made available upon request.
 - b. DEAC updates its online training manuals and courses with new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.
 - c. DEAC staff review the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures with on-site evaluators before each on-site visit.

PART THREE: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

DEAC has established twelve accreditation standards against which institutions seeking DEAC accreditation or renewal of accreditation are evaluated. Because accredited institutions are expected to maintain compliance with all twelve standards during their accreditation term, the standards are also used in mid-term monitoring processes.

Taken together, the twelve standards represent a comprehensive and detailed collection of requirements, focusing first on an institution's mission and then extending to all material dimensions of the institution's operations each of which are guided by and intended to support the institution's mission. The standards are intended to be both definitive and aspirational: definitive, in that each standard sets forth its requirements with precision and transparency; and aspirational because, as with all educational endeavors, there is always room to improve. That is why, running thematically through the standards, is the requirement that the institution continually monitors its performance and looks for opportunities to improve. Finally, and for avoidance of doubt, the Commission bases its decisions regarding accreditation on DEAC's published accreditation standards and does not use as a negative factor, when present, an institution's religious mission-based policies, decisions, and practices as these may be reflected in the institution's curricula, faculty, facilities, student support services, and recruiting and admissions policies.

I. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

INTRODUCTION

An institution's mission communicates its purpose and solidifies its identity within the educational community. The mission reflects a commitment to providing quality distance educational offerings that meet the needs of students and relevant stakeholders. The institution develops and implements policies and procedures within the context of its mission, assuring that educational offerings and administrative practices are of sufficient scope and quality to achieve the mission. In doing so, it also demonstrates compliance with the DEAC standards. This section identifies **three (3) core components** of Standard I.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE MISSION

The institution's mission communicates its purpose and its commitment to providing quality distance educational offerings appropriate to the level of study offered. The mission establishes the institution's identity within the educational community and guides the development of its educational offerings.

B. REVIEW AND PUBLICATION OF THE MISSION

The institution's leadership, faculty, staff, administrators, and other stakeholders regularly review the mission to assure continued institutional quality and viability. The published mission statement is readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, other stakeholders, and the public.

C. INFORMATION ON ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MISSION

The institution identifies key indicators it uses to demonstrate that it is effectively carrying out its mission. The institution documents the achievement of its mission and shares appropriate information on this achievement with relevant groups (e.g., Advisory Councils, faculty, staff, students, and the public).

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution's mission communicates its purpose and commitment to delivering quality distance educational offerings. The mission defines the institution, identifies what it does and for whom, and is regularly reviewed by all stakeholders. The institution measures ongoing achievement of its mission. The mission guides planning for the future.

II. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Two fundamental attributes of institutional sustainability are monitoring effectiveness and planning for the future. The institution implements a comprehensive effectiveness plan incorporating feedback loops, which lead to administrative and academic enhancements. Additionally, an institution plans for future growth and financial stability through focused activities within the strategic planning process. This section identifies **two (2) core components** of Standard II.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS PLANNING

The institution demonstrates a commitment to its educational offerings and administrative operations through processes that monitor and improve institutional effectiveness. The institution engages in sound research practices; collects and analyzes evidence about its effectiveness; and develops action plans that are used to improve operations, educational offerings, and services.

B. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The institution has a systematic process of planning for the achievement of goals that support its mission. The institution's planning process involves all areas of the institution's operations (e.g., admissions, academics, technology, etc.) in identifying strategic initiatives and goals by evaluating external and internal trends as they affect the future. At a minimum, the strategic plan addresses finances, academics, technology, admissions, marketing, personnel, and institutional sustainability. The strategic plan is reviewed and updated annually using established metrics designed to measure achievement of strategic planning goals and objectives. The plan helps institutions set priorities, manage resources, and set goals for future performance.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution demonstrates commitment to its educational offerings and administrative operations by engaging in processes that monitor institutional effectiveness and strategies for the future. The institution engages in research practices, collects meaningful evidence, and implements ongoing improvements. The institution involves relevant stakeholders in the development and achievement of strategic initiatives to attain its objectives and to assure sustainability.

III. **PROGRAM OUTCOMES, CURRICULA, AND MATERIALS**

INTRODUCTION

Program learning outcomes reflect academic competencies at the appropriate level and rigor. They communicate the knowledge and skills students will acquire upon successful completion of the program. The effective design of program outcomes, curricula, and supplemental materials results in cohesive educational offerings and in evaluation methods of student learning that are clearly connected to the stated outcomes. The institution delivers clear, up-to-date, and well-organized curricula and instructional materials and provides access to appropriate learning resources. Institutions present evidence that all educational offerings conform to commonly accepted education practices. This section identifies **ten (10) core components** of Standard III.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Program outcomes are clearly defined, simply stated, and indicate the benefits for students who are reasonably capable of completing the educational offering. Course learning outcomes are linked to program outcomes as identified by the institution and are consistent with the curricula offered.

B. APPROPRIATE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The program outcomes are measurable and reasonably attainable through distance education. Appropriate program outcomes clearly communicate the knowledge, skills, and abilities students will obtain upon completion of the educational offering. Program outcomes reflect the expected level of student achievement that promotes critical thinking, ethical reasoning, social responsibility, global citizenship, civic engagement, or lifelong learning, as applicable to the educational offerings.

1. DEGREE PROGRAMS

All required academic or professional activities, such as program outcomes, course learning outcomes, research projects, supervised clinical practice, field work, applied research exercises, theses, and dissertations, are clearly stated.

2. Capstone projects, if required, are consistent with academic and professional standards based on commonly accepted higher education practices and those of any applicable relevant professional organizations. Capstone project

learning outcomes are clearly stated.

3. DOCTORAL DEGREES

The outcomes of doctoral degree programs are advanced, focused, and scholarly, providing the breadth and depth of learning indicative of advanced degrees.

- a. Professional doctoral degrees prepare scholars to become leaders in their field of study through the pursuit of and contribution to contemporary research that is applied, practical, or project-oriented and is focused on the application of knowledge to a profession.
- b. The learning activities of doctoral degree programs include, as appropriate, seminars, professional meetings, in-residence requirements, discussions with colleagues, participation in sustained synchronous or asynchronous online conferences at predetermined points throughout the program, access to library services, and access to online chat rooms with fellow students, faculty, and relevant professionals.
- c. The professional doctoral degree program requires students to work with a supervisory dissertation/research project committee that is knowledgeable in graduate-level study and research methods in the discipline. Doctoral degree program curricula include the history and development of the field of study and its foundational theoretical principles.

C. CURRICULA DELIVERY

All curricula and instructional materials are appropriately designed and presented for distance education. Online materials sufficiently support the curriculum and are delivered using readily available, reliable technology.

D. COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULA AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Curricula and instructional materials are sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated program outcomes. Their organization and content are supported by reliable research and practice. The organization and presentation of the curricula and instructional materials reflect sound principles of learning and are grounded in distance education instructional design principles. The curricula and instructional materials reflect current knowledge and practice. Curricula and instructional materials are kept up to date, and reviews are conducted and documented on a periodic basis. 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.

1. The institution maintains an Advisory Council for each major group of programs or major subject matter disciplines it offers. The Advisory Council includes members not otherwise employed or contracted at the institution, consisting of practitioners and employers in the field for which the program prepares students. Advisory Councils

- a. meet at least annually;
 - b. provide advice on the current level of skills, knowledge, and abilities individuals need for entry into the occupation; and
 - c. provide the institution with recommendations on the adequacy of educational program outcomes, curricula, and course materials.
2. The institution determines whether courses in a program require any prerequisites. The institution also determines whether courses are offered in a prescribed sequence to maximize student achievement of the program outcomes.
3. GENERAL EDUCATION FOR DEGREE GRANTING
General education courses convey broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develop skills and attitudes that contribute to civic engagement, academic achievement, and professional attainment. General education courses address content not associated with a particular field of study. General education courses encompass written and oral communication; quantitative principles; natural and physical sciences; social and behavioral sciences; and humanities and fine arts and are designed to develop essential academic skills for enhanced and continued learning.
4. ASSOCIATE DEGREE
Associate degrees are awarded in academic or professional subjects for terminal career or technical programs. Institutions design and offer programs in a way that appropriately balances distinct types of education and training and includes a comprehensive curriculum with appropriate coursework to achieve the program outcomes. Associate degree programs consist of a minimum of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours. General education courses account for a minimum of 25 percent of the credits required for successful completion of associate degree programs.
5. BACHELOR'S DEGREE
Bachelor's degree programs are designed and offered in a way that appropriately balances distinct types and levels of education and must include a comprehensive curriculum with appropriate coursework to achieve the program outcomes. Bachelor's degree programs consist of a minimum of 120 semester credit hours or 180 quarter credit hours. General education courses represent a minimum of 25 percent of the credits required for successful completion of a bachelor's degree program.
6. MASTER'S DEGREE
Master's degree programs are designed and offered in a way that provides for a distinct level of education and fosters independent learning and an understanding of research methods appropriate to the academic discipline. Graduate-level courses are based on appropriate prerequisites, learning outcomes, and assessments. Institutions establish whether graduate courses are completed in a prescribed sequence to facilitate student achievement of

program outcomes. Master's degree programs are a minimum of 30 semester credit hours or 45 quarter credit hours.

7. FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

First professional degree programs are designed to offer a required academic credential leading to entry into a specific profession. The graduate degree program identifies competencies required for successful practice in the discipline. First professional degree programs require prior undergraduate preparation appropriate to the degree offered. Graduates of the first professional degree program demonstrate competencies that enable them to evaluate theories and engage in research relevant to the field of study. Demonstrated learning outcomes are comparable to those achieved during a minimum of 50 semester credit hours, 75 quarter credit hours, or their equivalent beyond the bachelor's degree.

8. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORAL DEGREE

Professional doctoral degree programs are designed to offer practice-oriented content leading to an advanced academic credential. Professional doctoral degree programs identify and teach competencies that support advancements in the field of study. Graduates of professional doctoral degree programs demonstrate the ability to conduct, interpret, and apply the results of appropriate research. Adequate oversight and advising are provided through all phases of the doctoral program, including clinical practice or fieldwork required by the field of study.

- a. Unless otherwise specified for a particular field of study (e.g. nursing, engineering), the program of study requires 60 graduate-level semester credit hours, 90 graduate-level quarter credit hours, or their equivalent beyond the master's degree with a maximum of 15 semester credit hours or 22.5 quarter credit hours for the dissertation or final research project. Professional doctoral degree programs are completed in no fewer than two years and no more than 10 years from the date of initial enrollment. A first professional degree in the same discipline may reduce the program requirements when the institution requires a minimum of 90 total graduate semester credit hours or 135 quarter credit hours after the bachelor's degree.
- b. Professional doctoral degrees require dissertations or capstone projects involving original contributions to the field of study using applied research methods. An appropriately credentialed doctoral committee approves dissertation and capstone project topics. A dissertation or capstone project manual is provided that includes guidelines on identifying, researching, writing on, and presenting the selected topic. Dissertations or capstone projects are appropriately defended by doctoral candidates before a doctoral committee via distance or in person. Professional doctoral degrees are awarded upon final approval by a majority of the doctoral

committee.

E. CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

1. Qualified persons competent in distance education instructional design practices-work with experts in subjects or fields to develop the content of all curricula and prepare instructional materials.
2. The institution describes its model for distance education delivery such as: correspondence, online, or hybrid.
3. Any contracting with a third party for educational delivery is conducted in accordance with DEAC Processes and Procedures, Part Two, Section XIX F.4. and F.5., Changes in Educational Offerings.

F. ACADEMIC UNITS OF MEASUREMENT

The institution documents policies and procedures used to define the chosen academic unit of measurement. Academic units are measured by either clock hours or credit hours.

1. CLOCK HOURS

The institution documents its implementation and application of policies and procedures for determining clock hours awarded for its courses and programs. A clock hour is one instructional hour. One instructional hour is defined as 50 minutes of instruction in a 60-minute period.

2. CREDIT HOURS

The institution documents its implementation and application of policies and procedures for determining credit hours awarded for its courses and programs. The assignment of credit hours must conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education. A credit hour is defined as an amount of work represented by intended learning outcomes and verified through evidence of student achievement in academic activities.

3. CREDIT HOUR DEFINITION

Semester and quarter hours are equivalent to the commonly accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement. Academic degree or academic credit-bearing distance education courses are measured by the learning outcomes normally achieved through 45 hours of student work for one semester credit¹ or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit.²

¹One credit/semester hour is 15 hours of academic engagement and 30 hours of preparation.

²One quarter hour credit is 10 hours of academic engagement and 20 hours of preparation.

4. DOCUMENTING CREDIT HOURS

The institution demonstrates that each course and program requires the appropriate amount of work needed for students to achieve the level of competency defined by institutionally established course/program outcomes. The institution measures and documents the amount of time it takes the average student to achieve learning outcomes and specifies the academic engagement and preparation time.

All student work is documented in the curricula materials and syllabi, including a reasonable approximation of time required for students to complete the assignments. Evaluation of student work is identified as a grading criterion and weighted appropriately in the determination of a final course grade.

G. EDUCATIONAL MEDIA AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning resources for faculty and students are available and appropriate to the level and scope of program offerings. Program designers, faculty, and instructors effectively use appropriate teaching aids and learning resources, including educational media and supplemental instructional aids, when creating programs and teaching students. The institution provides faculty and students with access to learning resources, libraries, or resource-related services that are appropriate for the achievement of program learning outcomes.

1. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Learning resources are systematically and regularly evaluated to assure that they meet student needs and support the institution's programs and mission. A variety of educational materials are selected, acquired, organized, and maintained to fulfill the institution's mission and support all educational offerings. Faculty are involved in the selection of learning resources.

2. GRADUATE DEGREES

In addition to the requirements for undergraduate degrees, graduate students are provided with access to library and other learning resources that are sufficient for research at the graduate level. The institution provides and encourages the use of library services and, if required, research and laboratory facilities at a distance or through arrangements with local institutions.

H. EXAMINATIONS AND OTHER ASSESSMENTS

Examinations and other assessment techniques provide adequate evidence of the achievement of stated learning outcomes. The institution establishes and enforces grading criteria that it uses to evaluate and document student attainment of learning outcomes.

1. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

The institution assesses student achievement through multiple means of evaluation (e.g., student presentations, group projects, essays, research papers,

participation in threaded discussions, supervised practica, or externships).

2. MASTER'S DEGREES

The institution assesses student achievement through multiple means of evaluation, including a culminating experience required for program completion (e.g., capstone experience, comprehensive examination, research project, or master's thesis).

3. FIRST PROFESSIONAL AND DOCTORAL DEGREES

The institution assesses student achievement through multiple means of evaluation that includes a doctoral dissertation or final research project as well as other forms of assessments such as qualifying examinations, comprehensive examinations, or other assessments that demonstrate student mastery of the stated program learning outcomes. The institution requires students to successfully complete all coursework and a doctoral dissertation or final research project to graduate from the program.

I. STUDENT INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

The institution publishes clear, specific policies related to student integrity and academic honesty. The institution affirms that the student who takes an assessment is the same person who enrolled in the program and that the examination results will reflect the student's own knowledge and competence in accordance with stated learning outcomes.

1. NON-DEGREE PROGRAMS

Institutions meet this requirement by using a secure login and passcode, administering proctored assessments, or by other means of secure technology.

2. DEGREE PROGRAMS

In addition to the requirements for non-degree programs above, degree-granting institutions meet this requirement by administering proctored assessments at intervals throughout the program of study and provide a clear rationale for placement of the proctored assessments within the program. Proctors use valid government-issued photo identification or other means to confirm student identity.

J. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

For any final research project, master's thesis, or dissertation that involves human research, the institution must require prior formal review and approval for all such research involving human subjects through an institutional review board (IRB), which has been designated to approve, monitor, and review all research involving human subjects. The IRB should ensure that the subjects are not placed at undue risk, that they have voluntarily agreed to participate, and that they have given appropriate informed consent. The IRB must meet all federal regulations, and the institution must be able to demonstrate that it is in compliance, including providing evidence that all IRB members have had appropriate training. (Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46)

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution demonstrates a commitment to delivering quality distance education by implementing curricula that are based on clear and measurable outcomes for learning and that provide opportunities for all students to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The curriculum is up to date and well organized and adheres to sound principles of instructional design appropriate to the method of instruction. The institution documents achievement of program outcomes through assessment methods that are relevant and appropriate to the level of educational offerings and are prepared by appropriately qualified academic personnel. The institution supplements curricula and provides students access to appropriate educational media and learning resources to allow for in-depth study and research.

IV. **EDUCATIONAL AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

INTRODUCTION

An effective institution demonstrates attention and active involvement when addressing students' educational needs and goals throughout all phases of an academic program. The institution demonstrates that proactive procedures are in place to adequately respond to students' inquiries, educational needs, and individual differences and encourage program completion. The institution implements appropriate assessment procedures using published grading policies and a fair, consistent marking system. It demonstrates that student records are adequately and securely maintained. The institution provides support services to assist students, including relevant counseling services and a published complaint policy. The institution offers comprehensive supplemental services to ensure that students have access to support for successful program completion. This section identifies **ten (10) core components** of Standard IV.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

The institution uses appropriate and readily accessible technology to optimize interaction between the institution and the student that effectively supports instructional and educational services. Students, faculty, and involved practitioners receive training and support for the technology used to deliver the educational offerings.

B. STUDENT INQUIRIES AND SUBMISSIONS

The institution publishes all available methods students can use to submit inquiries and assignments. The institution responds promptly and thoroughly to all student inquiries using all these channels.

C. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Academic advising and instructional support are provided to assist students in achieving institutional and program requirements, program outcomes, course learning

outcomes, and educational goals consistent with best educational practices and as required by applicable federal and state laws.

D. ENCOURAGEMENT OF STUDENTS

The institution's policies and procedures optimize interaction between the institution and students. The interaction proactively promotes student completion and success.

E. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

The institution implements and consistently applies a satisfactory academic progress policy and discloses this policy to students. Standards for measuring satisfactory academic progress include qualitative and quantitative standards used for evaluation of student progress. The institution takes appropriate action if students fail to meet the institution's minimum standards of progress. Students are informed of their academic progress and standing in the program at regular intervals throughout their enrollment.

F. GRADING POLICIES

Student academic performance is measured using published grading policies that include prompt return of accurately, fairly, and consistently graded assessments that are supervised by a qualified instructor or faculty member. The institution publishes its assignment marking system, course extension policy, and information on issuance and completion of incomplete grades and applies them with fairness and consistency.

G. STUDENT RECORDS

Accurate student records are securely and confidentially maintained. Policies and procedures for keeping records on students' academic progress are in accordance with applicable federal and state laws and professional requirements. Transcripts are readily accessible and are maintained permanently in either print or digital form.

H. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

The institution's policies protect student confidentiality and privacy as required by applicable federal and state laws.

I. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The institution provides support services designed for the students enrolled, such as financial aid guidance, advising services, employment assistance, and/or alumni services. Appropriate academic support services are readily available. Any career services and/or alumni services are offered as published in the institution's materials.

J. STUDENT COMPLAINTS

The institution has policies and procedures for receiving, responding to, and addressing student complaints. The policies and procedures should embody the principles of fairness, responsiveness, respect, due process and proportionality.

1. INSTITUTIONAL COMPLAINTS

DEAC requires institutions to have written complaint policies and procedures for the purposes of receiving, responding to, addressing, and resolving complaints made by students, faculty, administrators, or any party, including one who has good reason to believe that an institution is not in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

2. At a minimum, the institution's policy instructs students how to file a complaint or grievance and the maximum time for resolution. The institution's complaint policy and procedures are available to all students. The institution defines what it reasonably considers to be a student complaint.
3. The institution reviews in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives from students. When the complaint concerns a faculty member or administrator, the institution may not complete its review and make a final decision regarding a complaint unless, and in accordance with its published procedures, it ensures that the faculty member or administrator has sufficient opportunity to provide a response to the complaint. The institution takes any follow-up action, including enforcement action if necessary, based on the results of its review.
4. The institution's complaint policy states how complaints can be filed with state agencies and its accrediting organization.
5. The institution will retain the complete files for all complaints which may be filed against the institution, its faculty, staff, students or other associated parties for the longer of five years from the filing of the complaint or the completion of the institution's next cycle of evaluation for reaccreditation.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution places emphasis on supporting the instructional needs of its students, including documenting how instructional and non-instructional staff regularly engage to monitor student progress through and completion of educational offerings. Appropriately qualified instructors or faculty members assure that prompt responses to questions and submissions are returned to students. The institution anticipates the needs of individual students and provides appropriate guidance when accommodations are necessary. Institutions optimize interaction with students and incorporate those interactions into the continuous improvement of instructional materials and educational support services. Institutions maintain accurate, secure, and readily accessible records that are available to students. Institutional learning assessment procedures are guided by clearly published grading policies that encourage prompt return of all assignments and assessments. Supplemental student support services relevant to the needs of the student population are available where appropriate. A clearly articulated process to address student complaints is in place which ensures that students will feel comfortable expressing complaints and their complaints will be fairly and timely addressed and resolved; the institution is also expected to utilize data gathered from this process to improve its operations.

V. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SATISFACTION

INTRODUCTION

The institution implements a comprehensive assessment program, to monitor student satisfaction and achievement of learning outcomes. The institution's written outcomes assessment plan documents, monitors, and analyzes data collected to improve learning outcomes and to inform institutional effectiveness activities. This section identifies **three (3) core components** of Standard V.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The institution evaluates student achievement using indicators that it determines are appropriate relative to its mission and educational offerings. The institution evaluates student achievement by collecting data from outcomes assessment activities using direct and indirect measures. The institution maintains systematic and ongoing processes for assessing student learning and achievement, analyzes data, and documents that the results meet both internal and external benchmarks, including those comparable to courses or programs offered at peer DEAC-accredited institutions. The institution demonstrates and documents how the evaluation of student achievement drives quality improvement of educational offerings and support services.

B. STUDENT SATISFACTION

The institution systematically seeks student and alumni opinions as one basis for evaluating and improving curricula, instructional materials, method of delivery, and student services. The institution regularly collects evidence that students are satisfied with the administrative, educational, and support services provided.

C. PERFORMANCE DISCLOSURES

The institution routinely discloses on its website reliable, current, and accurate information on its performance, including student achievement, as determined by the institution.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution demonstrates a commitment to its students and educational offerings by implementing a comprehensive assessment program based on clearly defined, evidence-based, and measurable program and course learning outcomes. The assessment program is used to track student satisfaction, persistence, and the achievement of outcomes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the curricula and instruction offered by the institution and to improve student learning. The data received from these evaluations provide the institution with meaningful, timely, and accurate qualitative and quantitative information that is used by faculty, administrators, and various stakeholders to determine institutional effectiveness and to evaluate results of improvement efforts.

VI. ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The institution demonstrates effective leadership and a shared purpose through qualified and experienced administrators, faculty, and staff, who are responsible for academic operations. Institutions demonstrate that qualified individuals are serving in all relevant academic roles and contributing to the educational process. The chief academic officer and/or education director is appropriately qualified by education and experience to oversee administrative responsibilities for all educational offerings. The institution demonstrates that the appropriate number of instructors/faculty are employed and qualified by education and experience to achieve educational objectives and to provide individualized instructional service to students as needed. The institution encourages and regularly monitors continued professional development for all administrators, department heads, instructors/faculty, and staff. The institution documents procedures for hiring qualified individuals. It demonstrates commitment and collaboration among administrators, faculty, and staff to provide quality distance education programs for continued growth. This section identifies **four (4) core components** of Standard VI.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

The institution demonstrates appropriate academic leadership capacity and infrastructure to support the effective distance education delivery of educational offerings. Academic leaders possess the academic credentials, background, knowledge, ethics, and experience necessary to guide the instructional activities of the institution.

B. CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER (CAO) OR EDUCATION DIRECTOR

The institution designates a chief academic officer, education director, or other similar oversight position. This individual is responsible for overall administration of the educational program(s); for the educational, editorial, and research activities within departmental subject fields; and for faculty/instructors. The individual also informs marketing decisions.

Within the context of the institution's mission:

1. The CAO or education director has appropriate academic administrative experience and competence necessary to lead and manage educational offerings in a distance education environment.
2. The CAO or education director possesses academic credentials that are appropriate for the leadership, supervision, and oversight of faculty, curriculum design, and student achievement expectations.
3. DOCTORAL DEGREES

The institution appoints a director for doctoral degree programs. The director possesses previous higher education administrative capacity and distance learning knowledge to lead doctoral programs. The director possesses the appropriate terminal degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution in a subject area relevant to the degree program being offered.

4. DISSERTATION SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

A doctoral committee of at least three faculty members is assigned for each student. Doctoral committee members possess appropriate credentials, scholarship, experience, and practice in the field of study. At least one member of the doctoral committee is a member of the awarding institution's faculty. At least two members of the doctoral committee have earned doctoral degrees from appropriately accredited institutions other than from the awarding institution. All committee members are qualified in the subject area of the dissertation or research project topic. The institution has final approval for students who nominate faculty to the doctoral committee.

C. INSTRUCTORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

Faculty/instructors are qualified and appropriately credentialed to teach the subject at the assigned level. The institution employs a sufficient number of qualified faculty/instructors to provide individualized instructional service to each student. The institution maintains faculty/instructor résumés, official transcripts, and copies of applicable licenses or credentials on file. Faculty/instructors are carefully screened for appointment and are properly and continuously trained on institution policies, learner needs, instructional approaches and techniques, and the use of instructional technology. The institution regularly evaluates faculty and administrator performance using clear, consistent procedures. The institution assures that faculty are appropriately involved and engaged in the curricular and instructional aspects of the educational offerings. Faculty are assigned responsibilities based on their degree qualifications and/or area(s) of expertise.

1. HIGH SCHOOL

The institution provides evidence that all faculty/instructors are qualified and appropriately credentialed to teach the subject and level within the high school program offered.

2. NON-DEGREE

Instructors teaching technically- or practice-oriented courses have practical experience in the field and possess current licenses and/or certifications, as applicable.

3. OCCUPATIONAL/TECHNICAL ASSOCIATE DEGREE

Faculty possess earned credentials awarded by appropriately accredited institutions and/or have practical experience in the field and possess current licenses and/or certifications if applicable. The institution must demonstrate the academic preparation and practical experience of each faculty member

consistent with accepted postsecondary education practices.

4. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Faculty teaching undergraduate degree program courses possess, at a minimum, a degree at least one level above that of the program they are teaching and demonstrate expertise in the subject field of the discipline. Faculty teaching general education courses at the undergraduate level, including occupational/technical associate degrees, must possess a master's degree in the assigned general education subject field or have a master's degree and 18 semester credit hours in the general education subject field.

5. MASTER'S DEGREES

Faculty teaching graduate-level courses in a master's degree program must possess, at a minimum, a doctoral/terminal degree earned at an appropriately accredited institution in the subject field of the discipline and demonstrate familiarity with practical applications of the field.

6. FACULTY QUALIFICATION EQUIVALENCY

In limited and exceptional cases, institutions may demonstrate that faculty are qualified to teach at the undergraduate and master's levels through faculty qualification equivalency. Such equivalency is demonstrated by evidence of substantial breadth and depth of experiences and knowledge that are relevant to the discipline in which the faculty member is teaching. An institution that intends to substitute faculty qualification equivalency for the degree qualifications set forth in Standards VI.C.4 and VI.C.5 must have:

- a. well-defined policies, procedures and documentation that demonstrate how experience and knowledge are sufficient to determine that the faculty member has the expertise necessary to teach students in that discipline; and
- b. procedures that ensure that adequate oversight of teaching and learning is provided by individuals who possess degree qualifications in accordance with Standards VI.C.4 and VI.C.5.

7. FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

All teaching faculty and involved practitioners possess a first professional or higher degree earned at an appropriately accredited institution in a related subject field and possess specialized knowledge and skills in the subject area, consistent with educational practices of other similar programs.

8. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORAL DEGREES

All teaching faculty possess terminal degrees (e.g., professional doctoral degree or Ph.D.) earned at an appropriately accredited institution in a related subject field. Prior to enrolling students, the institution has in place a dedicated dean, director, or other academic officer with credentials

appropriate to the degree(s) being offered.

D. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

The institution demonstrates a commitment to faculty and staff professional development. The institution encourages faculty and staff 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. The institution provides faculty and administrators with access to a collection of professional educational materials to keep abreast of current trends, developments, techniques, research, and experimentation.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution has policies and procedures for delineating the roles and responsibilities for academic leadership and faculty for the short- and long-term stability of academic leadership. The institution employs appropriately qualified academic personnel to oversee the delivery of educational offerings. Academic officers and department heads are responsible for the accuracy of statements made regarding all academic matters. Faculty are sufficient in number and appropriately credentialed to guide enrolled students through all phases of the learning process. The institution maintains timely and accurate records of the qualifications of all academic personnel, including documentation of initial and ongoing professional development. The institution documents the success of academic personnel through clear, consistent procedures to evaluate performance.

VII. **ADVERTISING, PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE, AND RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL**

INTRODUCTION

All of the institution's advertising and promotion is current and ethical and accurately presents information that allows prospective students to make informed decisions without undue pressure. The institution's recruitment efforts focus on those prospective students who are likely to be successful and meet their academic goals through the educational offerings of the institution. Any institutional personnel who engage in activities to attract or enroll students are considered to be involved in recruitment. This section identifies **three (3) core components** of Standard VII.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

The institution conforms to ethical practices in all advertising and promotion to prospective students. All advertisements, website content, and promotional literature are truthful, accurate, clear, and readily accessible to the public; proactively states that programs are offered via distance education; and appropriately discloses occupational opportunities as applicable. Catalogs, enrollment agreements, manuals, and websites list the institution's full name and physical address. At a minimum, all print advertisements and promotional literature include the institution's city, state,

and website home page URL. The website home page URL, in accordance with DEAC's Website Disclosures Checklist, provides the institution's physical address. All web-based advertisements provide a link to the institution's website home page URL. All institutional social media account profiles provide a link to the institution's website home page URL. The institution complies with the DEAC's Catalog Disclosures Checklist and DEAC's Website Disclosures Checklist.

1. All advertisements and promotional materials accurately reflect the programs and services offered by the institution. The word "guarantee" is never used in advertisements. Under limited and exceptional circumstances, institutions may use the word "free" when it is appropriate to the mission and purpose of the institution.
 - a. IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM COMPONENT
All required in-residence components and additional associated costs are disclosed on the institution's websites, advertisements, and promotional materials.
2. The institution's website testimonials and endorsements are truthful and less than four years old. The institution maintains signed student consent forms for each published testimonial. The institution's website discloses all program requirements, course descriptions, tuition and related costs, program schedules, method of delivery, and its catalog prior to the collection of any personal student contact information. The institution does not use other institutions as triggers for its own sponsored links on Internet search engines.
3. The institution discloses in its catalog, website, and enrollment agreements that the acceptance of earned transfer credits is determined by the receiving institution.
4. The institution adheres to applicable catalog, website, and enrollment agreement disclosures checklists, based on educational offerings. The institution publishes student consumer information as required by federal and state statutes and regulations.
5. Any incentives offered to prospective and current students to enroll must be limited in nature to institution-branded items and in no event may such items exceed an aggregate value of \$100 annually with respect to any individual.
6. The institution permanently archives its catalogs.

B. INSTITUTION AND COURSE ACCREDITED-STATUS RECOGNITION

The institution accurately reflects its accredited status and uses the official DEAC accreditation logo and/or statement of accreditation when publishing its accreditation status in advertisements and promotional materials on its website and in social media.

DEAC's name, address, telephone number, and web address are published in the institution's catalog.

1. The institution publishes a statement of accreditation only as follows:
 - Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
 - DEAC Accredited
2. The institution refers to DEAC's recognition by the U.S. Department of Education only as follows: "The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is listed by the U.S. Department of Education as a recognized accrediting agency."
3. The institution refers to DEAC's recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) only as follows: "The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)."
4. The accredited institution publicly corrects any misleading or inaccurate information it releases on its accreditation status, contents of its on-site team reports from accreditation-related visits, and/or actions taken by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission with respect to the institution.
5. All courses and programs of the institution are approved by DEAC before the institution advertises them or enrolls students in them. The institution uses the term "College" or "University" in its name only if it offers academic degree programs.

C. STUDENT RECRUITMENT

The institution demonstrates that ethical processes and procedures are followed throughout the recruitment of prospective students by any individual who is authorized by the institution to participate in the enrollment process with prospective students. Minimum ethical practices and procedures are identified below.

1. The institution takes full responsibility for the actions, statements, and conduct of its authorized recruitment personnel. The institution maintains appropriate records, licensures, registrations, signed employment contracts, and signed DEAC Code of Ethics, as applicable for all recruitment personnel. The institution demonstrates it adequately trains its recruitment personnel and provides them with accurate information concerning employment and remuneration. All authorized recruitment personnel are provided with appropriate materials covering applicable procedures, policies, and presentations. The institution demonstrates that it routinely monitors its recruitment personnel or independent organizations that provide prospective applicant names to assure that they are in compliance with all state, federal,

and DEAC recruitment practices.

2. All personnel involved in student recruitment, including telemarketing staff, conform to applicable federal, state, and international laws. Personnel involved in student recruitment may not be given and may not use any title that indicates special qualifications for career guidance, advising, or registration, nor may they publish advertisements without written authorization from the institution.
3. If an institution offers students nominal gifts for referring prospective students to the institution who ultimately enroll in the institution, such gifts must be limited in nature to institution-branded items and in no event may exceed an aggregate value of \$100 annually with respect to any individual.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution adheres to high ethical standards throughout all advertising and recruitment practices. The institution ensures that students are not subjected to undue pressure to enroll or make financial commitments at any time during the recruitment process. Students are provided with and have access to accurate and current information to make appropriate educational decisions that meet their academic goals. The institution appropriately represents its mission, educational offerings, and accreditation through accurate and consistent publications.

VIII. **ADMISSION PRACTICES AND ENROLLMENT AGREEMENTS**

INTRODUCTION

The institution is responsible for establishing admissions criteria requiring documentation that applicants possess the ability to be successful in a distance education environment. Admissions criteria provide the institution an initial indicator of an applicant's ability to perform the level of work required by the educational offerings. An institution's admissions criteria reflect its mission, values, and student population. All admission practices and enrollment agreements meet established standards and ethically disclose all parties' obligations. This section identifies **seven (7) core components** of Standard VIII.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. ADMISSIONS DISCLOSURES

Admissions policies and procedures are designed to assure that the institution enrolls only those students who are reasonably capable of successfully completing and benefiting from the educational offering.

1. The institution informs each applicant, prior to admission, of the admissions criteria, the nature of the education provided, and the demands of the educational offerings. Prior to completing the enrollment process, the institution requires students to affirm access to the catalog and other

institutional documents disclosing the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of both the student and the institution.

2. The institution admits students regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, sex, or age. Institutions reasonably accommodate applicants and students with disabilities to the extent required by applicable laws.
3. Official transcripts, if required for admission, are received within one enrollment period not to exceed 12 semester credit hours, or the student is withdrawn from the program.

B. STUDENT IDENTITY VERIFICATION

Student identity verification is initiated during the admissions process to verify that the admitted student who participates in and completes coursework and assessments is the same student who is awarded credit.

C. COMPULSORY AGE STUDENTS

An institution enrolling students under the compulsory school age obtains permission from responsible parties to assure that the pursuit of the educational offerings is not detrimental to any compulsory schooling.

D. ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

The institution's admissions criteria align with its mission and student population served. The institution establishes qualifications that an applicant must possess prior to enrollment in order to successfully complete the stated educational offerings. The institution consistently and fairly applies its admission requirements. If an institution enrolls a student who does not meet the admissions criteria, the institution documents the reason(s) for the exception to the admissions criteria.

1. Transcripts not in English are evaluated by an appropriate third party and translated into English or evaluated by a trained transcript evaluator fluent in the language on the transcript. Evaluators possess expertise in the educational practices of the country of origin and include an English translation of the review.
2. The institution's admissions criteria disclose procedures for verifying appropriate language proficiencies. The institution verifies English language proficiency for applicants whose native language is not English and who have not earned a degree from an appropriately accredited institution where English is the principal language of instruction. Verification procedures align with DEAC's guidance on English Language Proficiency Assessment.
3. NON-DEGREE PROGRAMS
As appropriate for the students served and educational programs offered, the institution obtains official documentation that applicants possess a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent at the time of admission (e.g., high

school diploma, general educational development tests [GED], or self-certification statement).

Institutions that implement self-certification procedures must:

- obtain a signed statement from the applicant attesting to a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
- require applicants to provide the institution name, city, state, and year of graduation on the self-certification statement;
- develop and follow procedures to evaluate the validity of high school completion, or its equivalent, if the institution has reason to believe that the documentation was not obtained from an entity that provides secondary school education (e.g., general educational development tests or GED); and
- document that such practices are necessary to be consistent with the institution's mission.

4. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

The institution obtains official documentation that applicants possess a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent at the time of admission (e.g., high school diploma or general educational development tests [GED]). Institutions may implement self-certification in accordance with VIII(D)(3).

5. MASTER'S DEGREES

At the time of admission, the institution obtains official documentation that applicants possess a bachelor's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution.

6. FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

At the time of admission, the institution obtains documentation that applicants possess a bachelor's or master's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution.

7. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORAL DEGREES

At the time of admission, the institution obtains documentation that applicants possess a bachelor's or master's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution and relevant academic experience. At a minimum, the institution verifies that applicants have completed 30 graduate-level credit hours prior to admission.

E. ADMISSION ACCEPTANCE AND DENIAL

The institution informs applicants that they have been accepted for admission. The institution communicates with the applicant and documents the basis for any denial of admission.

F. TRANSFER CREDITS AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The institution implements a fair and equitable transfer credit policy that is published in the catalog. The steps for requesting transfer credit are clear and disclose the documentation required for review. Students are able to appeal transfer credit decisions using published procedures. Transfer credit requests are not denied based solely on the source of accreditation of the credit-granting institution.

Credit awarded for experiential or equivalent learning, including challenge and test-out credits, cannot exceed 25 percent of the credits required for an undergraduate degree. Institutions maintain official documentation of the bases for decisions to award credit for experiential or equivalent learning.

An institution seeking to offer credit for prior learning assessment publishes and follows evaluation standards consistent with CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning. Prior learning assessment is performed by qualified individuals with experience in the evaluation of prior learning.

In instances where a student seeks to transfer more than the maximum allowable percentage of required credit hours specified in the relevant degree category listed in subsection F.2. through F.5. below, the institution must conduct a comprehensive assessment of the student's credits earned and document how the credits align with its program outcomes. In such cases, transfer credit allowances may not exceed the lesser of any applicable state requirements or 90 percent of the credits required for undergraduate degrees, 75 percent of the credits required for master's degrees or first professional degrees, or 40 percent of the credits required for professional doctoral degrees.

1. HIGH SCHOOL

The institution may award a maximum of 75 percent of the credits required for a high school program.

2. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

The institution may award a maximum of 75 percent of the credits required for a degree program, or a combination of transfer credit and experiential or equivalent credit (including challenge/test-out credits). Courses accepted for transfer credit are relevant to the program of study and equivalent in both content and degree level. Credit awarded for experiential or equivalent learning cannot exceed 25 percent of the credits required for a degree.

3. MASTER'S DEGREES

The institution may award a maximum of 50 percent of the credits required for a master's degree program through transfer credit. Courses accepted for transfer credit are relevant to the program of study and equivalent in both content and degree level. Credit awarded for experiential or equivalent learning cannot exceed 25 percent of the credits required for a master's

degree.

4. FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

The institution may award a maximum of 50 percent of the credits required for a first professional degree program through transfer credit. Courses accepted for transfer credit are relevant to the program of study and equivalent in both content and degree level.

5. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORAL DEGREES

The institution may award a maximum of 15 percent of the credits required for a professional doctoral degree program (or nine semester credit hours for a 60 semester credit hour degree program) through transfer credit. Courses accepted for transfer credit are relevant to the program of study and equivalent in both content and degree level.

G. ENROLLMENT AGREEMENTS

The institution's enrollment agreements/documents clearly identify the educational offering and assure that each applicant is fully informed of the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of both the student and the institution prior to applicant signature. The institution complies with the DEAC Enrollment Agreements Disclosures Checklist.

1. The institution requires that, prior to accepting the enrollment agreement, students affirm and accept the tuition refund policy and the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of both the student and the institution. The terms of the tuition refund policy are published in the institution's enrollment agreement, catalog, and website.
2. An enrollment agreement is not binding until it has been submitted by the student and accepted by the institution. A copy of the accepted enrollment agreement is made available to the student within 10 days of acceptance and maintained as a part of the student's record.
3. The institution complies with all applicable Truth in Lending Act (TILA) requirements, including those under Regulation Z, and state requirements for retail installment agreements.
4. All required state and Truth in Lending Act disclosures are included in the enrollment agreement. Requirements for type size, notice to buyer, and computation examples, as applicable, are observed.
5. If there is a separate payment contract, the contract is incorporated by reference in the enrollment agreement.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution demonstrates a commitment to ethical enrollment practices through fair and transparent admission and enrollment policies. The institution

implements appropriate procedures to assure that enrolled students possess the capacity to successfully complete and benefit from the educational offering. The institution discloses all admission, tuition, and refund information and makes every effort to ensure that students fully understand the obligations of both the institution and the student. The institution's enrollment agreements are available for students to review, and they provide the scope and nature of the educational offerings.

IX. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES, CANCELLATIONS, AND REFUND POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

The institution establishes fair and equitable tuition, cancellation, refund, and collection policies and procedures. Information about tuition costs and instructional fees, including textbooks, is readily accessible to students. Tuition and refund policies are disclosed on all enrollment agreements. Collection procedures are conducted ethically. The institution's tuition, refund, and collection policies are administered consistently and fairly. This section identifies **five (5) core components** of Standard IX.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES

All costs relative to the education provided by the institution are disclosed to the prospective student [in an enrollment agreement or similar contractual document] before enrollment. Costs must include tuition, educational services, textbooks, and instructional materials; any specific fees associated with enrollment, such as application and registration fees; and fees for required services such as student authentication, proctoring, technology access, and library services.

1. The costs for optional services, such as expedited shipment of materials, experiential portfolio assessment, or other special services, such as dissertation binding, are clearly disclosed to prospective students as not subject to refund after the five (5)-calendar-day student-right-to-cancel enrollment.
2. The institution's disclosure of its refund policy must include a sample refund calculation that describes the calculation methodology using clear and conspicuous language. Student acknowledgement of the refund policy is obtained and documented in the enrollment agreement or similar contractual document prior to enrollment.

B. CANCELLATIONS

1. Institutions must maintain, publish, and apply fair and equitable cancellation and withdrawal policies. A student's notification of cancellation may be conveyed to the institution in any manner the institution deems appropriate so long as the method or methods chosen

- a. are in compliance with applicable federal and state requirements and
- b. do not create unreasonably difficult requirements for the student to satisfy.

Institutions must designate the manner in which students may submit cancellation or withdrawal notification and the individual, office, or offices to whom students may submit notice of official cancellation or withdrawal.

2. A student has five (5) calendar days after signing an enrollment agreement or similar contractual document to cancel enrollment and receive a full refund of all monies paid to the institution.
3. A student requesting cancellation more than five calendar days after signing an enrollment agreement, but prior to beginning a course or program, is entitled to a refund of all monies paid minus:
 - an application/transfer credit evaluation fee of up to \$75;
 - a one-time registration fee per program of no more than 20 percent of the tuition and not to exceed more than \$200; and
 - library service fees, if provided by a third-party service (e.g., LIRN, Westlaw, ProQuest, EBSCO).
4. Upon cancellation, a student whose costs of education are paid in full, but who is not eligible for a refund, is entitled to receive all materials, including kits and equipment.
5. If promissory notes or enrollment agreements are sold to third parties, the institution ensures that it and any third parties comply with DEAC cancellation policies.

C. REFUNDS

Each institution must have and implement a fair and equitable refund policy in compliance with state requirements or, in the absence of such requirements, in accordance with DEAC's refund policy standards below and disclosed in the enrollment agreement or similar contractual document.

Any money due a student must be refunded within 30 days of a cancellation request, regardless of whether materials have been returned.

1. FLEXIBLE TIME SCHEDULE REFUND POLICY

An institution that implements the flexible time schedule refund policy must clearly disclose the curriculum benchmarks in terms of assignments submitted for grading that indicate completion at 10 percent, 25 percent, and 50 percent intervals.

When a student cancels after completing at least one lesson assignment but less than 50 percent of the graded assignments, the institution may retain the application fee and one-time registration fee of no more than 20 percent of the tuition (not to exceed \$200) and library service fees, plus a percentage of tuition paid by the student in accordance with the following schedule:

Percentage Completed by the Student	Percentage of Tuition Returned to the Student Minus the Application and/or Registration Fee	Percentage of Tuition Retained by the Institution
Up to 10 %	90%	10%
>10% - 25%	75%	25%
>25% - 50%	50%	50%
>50% - 100%	0%	100%

2. TIME-BASED TERM REFUND POLICY

A time-based term lasts no more than 16 weeks.

A time-based term refund policy may be applied to any course, program, or degree. Institutions that utilize the Time-Based Term Refund Policy must refund 100 percent of the tuition for any course never started. Institutions that implement the Time-Based Term Refund Policy must clearly disclose the time-based refund schedule on the enrollment agreement.

When enrolling students in an academic program of study comprised of two or more courses that award semester credit hours, institutions must treat each course separately for the purposes of calculating the appropriate amount of tuition refund owed to the student.

When a student cancels enrollment, the institution may retain the application fee and a one-time registration fee of no more than 20 percent of the tuition (not to exceed \$200) and library service fees, plus a percentage of tuition paid by the student in accordance with the following refund schedule:

Length of Term	Percentage of Tuition Returned to the Student Minus the Application and/or Registration Fee AFTER	
1-6 weeks	1 st week	70%
	2 nd week	40%
	3 rd week	20%
	4 th week	0%
7-10 weeks	1 st week	80%
	2 nd week	60%
	3 rd week	40%
	4 th week	20%
	5 th week	0%

11-16 weeks	1 st week	80%
	2 nd week	70%
	3 rd week	60%
	4 th week	50%
	5 th week	40%
	6 th week	30%
	7 th week	20%
	8 th week	10%
	9 th week	0%

3. REFUND POLICY FOR IN-RESIDENCE COURSES/PROGRAMS

For a course/program that includes mandatory in-residence training, the costs for the distance study portion and the costs for the in-residence portion must be separately stated in the enrollment agreement.

The distance study portion of the combination course/program must use the refund policy stated in Section IX(C)(1) or Section IX(C)(2) above. If the mandatory in-residence portion of the course/program is more than six weeks, the institution may use the time-based refund policy in Section IX(C)(2). If the in-residence portion is less than six weeks, the institution may use the flexible time schedule refund policy in IX(C)(1).

If a student requests cancellation after attending the first in-residence class session, the institution may retain the application fee and a one-time registration fee of no more than 20 percent of the tuition, not to exceed \$200, and library service fees, plus a percentage of tuition paid by the student in accordance with the following refund schedule:

Percentage Completed by the Student	Percentage of Tuition Returned to the Student Minus the Application and/or Registration Fee	Percentage of Tuition Retained by the Institution
Up to 10%	90%	10%
>10 - 25%	75%	25%
>25 - 50%	50%	50%
>50 - 100 %	0%	100%

Courses with optional in-residence training, seminars, and other training sessions are subject to the refund policy above.

D. DISCOUNTS

Discounted costs are permitted for well-defined groups for specific and bona fide purposes.

Discounted costs must indicate the actual reduction in the costs that would otherwise be charged by the institution. Institutions that offer discounts must demonstrate that students are enrolled in non-discounted courses or programs for a reasonably substantial period of time during each calendar year. An institution offering discounts must calculate refunds based on discounted costs.

An institution that offers discounts must demonstrate that:

- All discounts or special offers identify the specific costs for a course or program.
- The presentation of discounts and special offers complies with DEAC's advertising and promotion standards.
- All discounts (excluding those offered to well-defined groups) or special offers designate a specific expiration date and do not extend beyond the expiration date.

E. COLLECTIONS

Collection procedures used by the institution or third parties reflect sound and ethical business practices. Tuition collection practices and procedures are fair, encourage students' progress, and seek to retain their good will. Collection practices consider the rights and interests of the students and the institution.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution discloses its tuition, cancellation, refund, and collection policies and procedures prior to student enrollment. All cancellations and refunds are processed promptly upon notification by the student in any manner. The institution maintains student good will throughout the collections process and assures that students are aware of the responsibilities and obligations of both the institution and the student.

X. **INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE**

INTRODUCTION

The governance structure of the institution provides sufficient administrative oversight, capability, and stability in the efficient and effective use of institutional resources. The institution demonstrates adequate management, administrative capacity, and succession and business continuity planning to provide assurances it can accomplish its mission in a manner consistent with its values while fulfilling its obligations to students. This section identifies **three (3) core components** of Standard X.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. OWNERS, GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS, OFFICIALS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

The institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess appropriate qualifications and experience for their positions and the ability to oversee institutional operations. The owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators are knowledgeable and experienced in one or more aspects of education administration, finance, teaching/learning, and distance study. The institution's policies clearly delineate the duties and responsibilities of owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators. Individuals in leadership and managerial positions are qualified by education and experience.

B. REPUTATION OF INSTITUTION, OWNERS, GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS, OFFICIALS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

The institution and its owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations, a record of integrity, and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The institution must promptly notify DEAC of any investigative, enforcement, legal or prosecutorial actions which may be initiated or which are current against the institution, its owners, governing board members, officials and administrators. Such notification shall include an explanation of the circumstances giving rise to such actions and the institution's response to the same as well as its explanation of why such actions should not be deemed a concern with respect to the integrity of the named persons or institutions.

C. SUCCESSION PLAN

The institution has written plans that describe the process that it follows in the event that a leadership succession is necessary. The plan identifies specific people, committees, or boards responsible to carry on the operation of the institution during the transition period. The plan includes a business continuity structure that the institution can implement immediately. The institution reviews and revises the plan on an annual basis.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution's governance assures ethical decision-making processes in the efficient and effective use of institutional resources, enabling the achievement of strategic initiatives. The members of the institution's governance structure are appropriately qualified and possess the experience necessary to support the mission, values, and future of the institution. They support the mission through the implementation of collaborative oversight for the continuous delivery of high-quality distance education. The members of the governance structure demonstrate a commitment to all stakeholders by developing a succession plan that is reviewed annually to assure ongoing institutional operations.

XI. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

INTRODUCTION

The institution demonstrates financial capability and stability to meet accreditation standards on a continuous basis. The institution possesses adequate financial resources in order to meet its mission and values while delivering high quality educational offerings. The institution retains qualified and knowledgeable financial leadership to assure continued financial sustainability. This section identifies **five (5) core components** of Standard XI.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. FINANCIAL PRACTICES

The institution shows that it is financially responsible by providing complete, comparative financial statements covering its two most recent fiscal years and by demonstrating that it has sufficient resources to meet its financial obligations to provide quality instruction and service to its students. Financial statements are audited or reviewed and prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles in the United States of America or International Financial Reporting Standards. The institution's budgeting processes demonstrate that current and future budgeted operating results are sufficient to allow the institution to accomplish its mission and goals.

B. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Individuals overseeing the fiscal and budgeting processes are qualified by education and experience. The institution employs adequate administrative staff for effective operations, and at least one person is qualified and able to prepare accurate financial reports in a timely manner. Internal auditing trails and controls are in place to assure that finances are properly managed, monitored, and protected. Adequate safeguards prevent unauthorized access to online and on-site financial information.

C. FINANCIAL STABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The institution maintains adequate administrative staff and other resources to operate effectively as a going concern and is not exposed to undue or insurmountable risk. Any risk that exists is adequately monitored, manageable, and insured. In the event the financial operations of the institution are supported by a parent company or a third party, audited or reviewed financial statements are provided by the supporting entity to demonstrate that the supporting entity possesses sufficient financial resources to provide the institution continued financial sustainability, as well as the commitment to do so. If the institution's financial performance is included within the parent corporation's statements, a supplemental schedule for the individual institution is appended to the parent statement.

D. FINANCIAL REPORTING

Financial statements are prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles in the United States of America often referred to as "GAAP," including the accrual method of accounting. An independent certified public accountant (CPA) audit or review report accompanies these statements.

1. The institution's financial statements reflect sufficient liquid assets to provide for a staff and faculty.
2. Annually, the institution has the option of submitting one of these two types of financial statements, unless the Commission directs the institution to submit audited financial statements.
 - Audited comparative financial statements containing an audit opinion by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, or
 - Reviewed comparative financial statements containing a review report by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

When circumstances raise a concern as to the financial soundness and stability of an institution, the Commission may, in its discretion, require that the institution deliver within a specified period of time (as reasonably determined by the Commission taking into account, for example, the exigency of the concerns and the size of the institution), audited comparative financial statements or such other financial documentation as the Commission may determine will provide information as to the institution's financial health and status.

3. Financial statements submitted must include the institution's fiscal statement for the two most recent fiscal years prepared on a comparative basis or a date specified by the Commission, the CPA's opinion letter or review report, and a letter of financial statement validation.

E. DEMONSTRATED OPERATIONS

In all respects, the institution documents continuous sound and ethical operations, including the necessary resources to accommodate demand and assure that all learners receive a quality educational experience. The institution's name is free from any association with activity that could damage the reputation of the DEAC accrediting process, such as illegal actions, fraud, unethical conduct, or abuse of consumers.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution employs qualified and experienced financial leadership who possess the capacity to meet accreditation standards. The institution exhibits effective business practices through fiscally responsible policies and procedures designed to assure ongoing stability. The institution follows generally accepted accounting principles that guide all financial and reporting practices. The institution demonstrates adequate financial management that promotes financial sustainability.

XII. FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, RECORD PROTECTION AND RETENTION

INTRODUCTION

The institution maintains facilities, equipment, and supplies that promote and support its mission and values. The institution's procedures for determining budgets assure that financial resources are adequate to support continued growth and provide a safe work environment for faculty and staff. Institutions demonstrate adequate protection for all records and implement appropriate retention policies as required by applicable federal and state laws and authorization rules. Institutional facilities, equipment, supplies, and record protection and retention procedures meet accepted educational, administrative, business, and legal practices. This section identifies **three (3) core components** of Standard XII.

CORE COMPONENTS

A. FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND SUPPLIES

The institution maintains sufficient facilities, equipment, and supplies to achieve its mission and values and support its educational offerings for future operations. A written plan outlines the maintenance and upgrade of facilities, equipment, and supplies and includes a disaster response and recovery plan. The plan states the resources that are budgeted to support its goals. Buildings, workspace, and equipment comply with local fire, building, health, and safety regulations and are appropriately equipped to handle the educational program(s) of the institution.

B. IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM COMPONENT

The institution provides appropriate training facilities for students participating in in-residence training and information on housing, as applicable. The facilities are in compliance with all state and federal requirements. The institution maintains adequate insurance to protect students, faculty, and staff while participating in in-residence training.

C. RECORD PROTECTION

The institution's financial, administrative, and student educational records are maintained in a reasonably accessible place and are adequately protected in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.

1. If maintaining documents electronically, the institution provides audit records to verify that the images were properly created and validated.
2. If an institution accepts digitally signed transcripts or electronically transferred verified data from an outside source, the institution documents the outside source using a system that provides registration and verification of participants, protocols for securely sending and receiving files, logging of file transmissions, and electronic notification. The outside source complies with

all applicable laws and regulations governing the activities and services provided, including FERPA and other laws concerning the privacy and confidentiality of information and records.

D. RECORD RETENTION

The institution's financial, administrative, and student educational records are retained in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. The institution implements a comprehensive document retention policy.

E. STATE AUTHORIZATION

1. The institution is properly licensed, authorized, exempted, or approved by all applicable state education institutional authorizations (or their equivalent for non-U.S. institutions).
2. Exemptions from state law are supported by state-issued documentation or in statutory language for that state.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution maintains sufficient physical and fiscal resources and support systems to deliver quality distance education programs that enable students to achieve their educational goals. The physical facilities promote the safety and welfare of all faculty and administrative support staff. Individuals in leadership roles are appropriately qualified by education and experience to develop written facilities plans and emergency action plans to support the mission, growth, and sustainability of the institution. The institution demonstrates a commitment to ethical business practices by maintaining institutional records, student records, and student privacy in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.

PART FOUR: APPENDICES

I. CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

It is in the best interest of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) to be aware of and properly manage all conflicts of interest and appearances of a conflict of interest. This conflict of interest policy is designed to help accrediting commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, consultants, administrative staff, appeals panel members, and employees of the DEAC to identify situations that present potential conflicts of interest and to provide DEAC with a procedure to appropriately manage conflicts and ensure that its accrediting activities are conducted in an environment free of bias, in accordance with legal requirements and the goals of accountability and transparency in DEAC's operations.

A. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DEFINED

For purposes of this policy, a person with a conflict of interest is referred to as an "interested person." The following circumstances shall be deemed to create a conflict of interest:

- Ownership of some or all of an institution, its assets, or the stock of the company that owns or operates the institution;
- The holding of mortgages, liens, or other debt instruments or interest upon an institution or its assets;
- Having been employed, or currently employed, at the institution;
- Currently employed with a DEAC institution that competes with the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, as a consultant to the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, on a board, advisory council, or committee of the institution;
- Having attended the institution as a student;
- Having financial interest (including holding stocks, etc.) in the institution or a business or enterprise that competes with DEAC;
- Having a close personal friend or family member at the institution; or
- Having accepted gifts, entertainment, or other favors from individuals or entities (see below).

Other situations may create the appearance of a conflict or present a duality of interests in connection with a person who has influence over the activities or finances of the DEAC.

All such circumstances should be disclosed to the DEAC executive director, as appropriate, and a decision made as to what course of action the organization or individuals should take so that the best interests of the DEAC are not compromised by the personal interests of stakeholders in the DEAC.

B. GIFTS, GRATUITIES, AND ENTERTAINMENT

Accepting gifts, entertainment, or other favors from individuals or entities can also result in a conflict or duality of interest when the party providing the gift/entertainment/favor

does so under circumstances where it might be inferred that such action was intended to influence or possibly would influence the interested person in the performance of his or her duties. Souvenirs (typically available to the public) are permissible but should be restricted to inexpensive items representing the institution.

1. DEFINITIONS

In this policy, the following terms are defined as:

- a. A “conflict of interest” is any circumstance described in part A of this policy.
- b. An “interested person” is any person serving as commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee of DEAC or anyone else who is in a position of control over DEAC and has a personal interest that is in conflict with the interests of DEAC.
- c. A “family member” is a spouse, parent, child, or spouse of a child or a brother, sister, or spouse of a brother or sister, of an interested person.
- d. A “material financial interest” in an entity is a financial interest of any kind, which, in view of all the circumstances, is substantial enough that it would, or reasonably could, affect an interested person’s or family member’s judgment with respect to transactions to which the entity is a party. Where the potential for pecuniary gain or the appearance of it is involved, as in reporting on or evaluating a current or potential direct competitor or partner or an institution in which the participant has a financial interest, the participant has a conflict of interest.
- e. An “appearance of a conflict” means there is an appearance of partiality involved, as in a situation where the person who has a conflict of interest has a relationship with an institution or its principals such that evaluations or decisions may appear to be unduly influenced by that relationship.
- f. A “duality of interests” means when a person has divided loyalties or when a person has a personal interest that conflicts with the interest of DEAC.

2. PROCEDURES

The procedures for addressing a conflict of interest, an appearance of a conflict, or a duality of interests are as follows:

- a. Prior to a Commission meeting, an on-site evaluation, a course/program review, an appeals panel hearing, a consultation, or any action on an institution involving a conflict of interest, the person having a conflict of interest shall disclose to the DEAC executive director all facts material to the conflict of interest. If any interested persons are aware that staff or other persons have a conflict of interest, relevant facts should be disclosed

by the interested person him/herself to the executive director for purposes of disclosure.

- b. Where the appearance of partiality is involved, as in a situation where the person who has a conflict of interest has a relationship with an institution or its principals such that evaluations or decisions may appear to be unduly influenced by that relationship, the person with the conflict of interest must advise the next higher person in the process and must recuse him/herself. Guidance should be sought from the DEAC executive director in questionable cases.
- c. A person who has a conflict of interest shall not participate in or be permitted to hear any discussion of or to vote on any matter being considered. Such person shall not attempt to exert his or her personal influence with respect to the matter, either at or outside the meeting.
- d. In the event it is not entirely clear that a conflict of interest exists, the individual with the potential conflict shall disclose the circumstances to the DEAC staff member/executive director, who shall determine whether a conflict of interest exists that is subject to this policy.

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

Protecting confidentiality is an important part of the accreditation process. Interested persons are reminded of the following:

- a. Each accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall exercise care not to disclose confidential information acquired in connection with disclosures of conflicts of interest or potential conflicts, which might be adverse to the interests of DEAC.
- b. Accrediting commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, consultants, administrative staff, appeals panel members, and employees will not discuss any confidential aspect of an application for DEAC accreditation with the applicant, an institution accredited by DEAC, a direct competitor of the applicant, or any other third party except as required in order to discharge the responsibilities of the participant in the accreditation review. DEAC will communicate the results of the Commission's decision to the applicant and the public.
- c. Furthermore, accrediting commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, consultants, administrative staff, appeals panel members, and employees shall not disclose or use information relating to the business of DEAC for their personal profit or advantage or the personal profit or advantage of their family member(s).

4. REVIEW OF POLICY

The following describes the review process for this policy:

- a. Each accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall be provided with and asked to review a copy of this policy and to acknowledge in writing that he or she has done so.
- b. Each accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall complete a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form identifying any relationships, positions or circumstances in which s/he is involved that s/he believes could present a conflict of interest.
- c. Any such information regarding the business interests of an accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or DEAC employee, or a family member thereof, shall be treated as confidential and shall generally be made available only to the executive director and any committee appointed to address conflicts of interest, except to the extent additional disclosure is necessary in connection with the implementation of this policy.
- d. This policy shall be reviewed annually by each member of the Accrediting Commission. Any changes to the policy shall be communicated to all staff and interested persons.
- e. On-site evaluators must annually read and agree to the conditions of the DEAC Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators in addition to this policy.

5. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE FORM

This form is completed annually by each accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee.

I agree to complete the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form for all institutions I review.

I have read and received a copy of DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy.

Name: _____ Signature: _____
Title: _____ E-mail: _____
Institution/Company: _____ Date: _____

II. **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE FORM**

Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Institution(s) being reviewed: _____ Date Visit/Review/Meeting: _____

Your Position: _____

Please note that a separate form must be completed for each occasion. For multiple institutions, a list or agenda may be attached to this document.

Conflict of Interest: The following circumstances shall be deemed to create a conflict of interest:

- Ownership of some or all of an institution, its assets, or the stock of the company that owns or operates the institution;
- The holding of mortgages, liens, or other debt instruments or interest upon an institution or its assets;
- Having been employed, or currently employed, at the institution;
- Currently employed with a DEAC institution that competes with the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, as a consultant to the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, on a board, advisory council, or committee of the institution;
- Having attended the institution as a student;
- Having financial interest (including holding stocks, etc.) in the institution or a business or enterprise that competes with DEAC;
- Having a close personal friend or family member at the institution; or
- Having accepted gifts, entertainment or other favors from individuals or entities (see below).

___ I **do not** have a conflict of interest with this/these institution(s)

___ I **do** have a conflict of interest to report (please describe on next page)

Other situations may create the *appearance of a conflict* or present a *duality of interests* in connection with a person who has influence over the activities or finances of the DEAC. All such circumstances should be disclosed to the DEAC executive director, as appropriate, and a decision made as to what course of action the organization or individuals should take so that the best interests of the DEAC are not compromised by the personal interests of stakeholders in the DEAC.

I hereby certify that the information set forth above is true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have reviewed, and agree to abide by, DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy.

Signature: _____ Today's Date: _____

[illegible]

III. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ON-SITE EVALUATORS

- A. High standards of honesty, integrity, and impartiality by on-site evaluators are essential for the proper performance of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission's business and the maintenance of confidence by institutions in the accreditation process. This confidence is influenced not only by the way an on-site evaluator conducts him/herself, but also in the way he/she conducts him/herself in the eyes of other accredited institutions and the public. To help on-site evaluators avoid any misconduct and conflicts of interest and to ensure that DEAC's accreditation activities are conducted in an environment free of bias, DEAC has adopted the following code of conduct.

As an on-site evaluator, I agree to:

1. conduct myself in a manner which seeks to avoid a conflict of interest or any appearance of conflict of interest;
2. read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form;
3. engage in no outside employment or other outside activity not compatible with the full and proper discharge of the responsibilities of a member of the DEAC Examining Committee;
4. recruit no staff or offer my services, nor shall I take any information or materials for personal interest or gain during the on-site evaluation;
5. state no opinion or prediction concerning possible action by the Commission that may result from the on-site evaluation;
6. direct any inquiries I may have, or request for additional information after the on-site visit, to the DEAC staff;
7. treat all information obtained through the institution's participation in the accreditation process as confidential, and not disclose such information to parties other than members of the examining committee, the Commission, and the DEAC staff except pursuant to valid governmental regulation or judicial procedure;
8. participate in no litigation or other legal proceedings involving institutions that are or may seek to become accredited by DEAC without consulting with DEAC's counsel and the executive director;
9. discuss no accreditation matters on behalf of the appeals panel or Commission with members of the media, referring any media inquiries to the executive director;
10. discuss no legal matters involving the institution evaluated or to be

evaluated with counsel for the institution or any third party;

11. exercise due diligence in becoming familiar with, and an authority on, DEAC accreditation standards and policies;
12. participate in a training program prior to my participation in on-site evaluations that include training on DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy, exercise due diligence in preparing for the institution's on-site evaluation, and come to the on-site evaluation familiar with all assigned materials and prepared to fully participate in the process;
13. participate fully in the process and otherwise conduct myself during the on-site visit in a manner consistent with my best, impartial and unfettered judgment, and in furtherance of the Commission's purpose;
14. conduct myself professionally, impartially, and courteously during the on-site evaluation; and
15. report any alleged violations of the Code of Conduct immediately to the DEAC executive director.

B. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ON-SITE EVALUATORS AGREEMENT

This form is completed annually.

I have read and agree to the conditions and have received a copy of the DEAC Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

If the DEAC staff member or Commission member should determine that an on-site evaluator has violated the DEAC Code of Conduct, he/she may sanction the offending on-site evaluator through an oral or written reprimand or prohibit that individual from being a member of any DEAC evaluation team in the future.

IV. SELECTING AND TRAINING COMMISSIONERS

A. PROCEDURES FOR THE SELECTING AND TRAINING DEAC COMMISSIONERS

The process of selecting and vetting an individual to serve on the Commission begins with DEAC's Nominating Committee. The Committee is charged with nominating individuals to be elected or appointed to the Accrediting Commission. Institution members of the Commission are elected by DEAC-accredited members, and public members of the Commission are appointed by the Accrediting Commission. The Nominating Committee is comprised of five individuals, three from the DEAC-accredited membership not currently serving on the Commission and two Commissioners, with one being a public member.

Nominations come from interested persons, the general public, and DEAC-accredited members. Using the qualifications described below, the executive director first interviews the nominees to see if they are willing to perform the responsibilities required of Commissioners, including completing the training, time commitments, and meeting dates and to identify any conflict of interests.

For institution commissioners, the Nominating Committee reviews and vets the nominees' résumés. Once candidates are recommended by the Nominating Committee and confirmed by the Commission, the nominations for institution members are published for a period not less than 30 days prior to the Annual Business Meeting of the DEAC. Once the nominations are closed, the members of DEAC vote.

The nominations for the public commissioners are presented to the members of the Commission, who make the final appointment. Commissioners have the opportunity to interact with nominees as public commissioner candidates are invited to observe an Accrediting Commission meeting before the Commission votes on appointments.

B. SIZE AND MAKE-UP OF THE COMMISSION

The selection criteria used for the Board of Directors who serve as the Accrediting Commission are prescribed by the *DEAC Bylaws* Article IV Directors. Under Section 2, it states the Board of Directors will "consist of ten (10) Directors, five (5) Institutional Directors from Members of the Corporation elected by the Members and five (5) Public Directors appointed by the Board of Directors to represent the public. Under Section 3 it states that at least two members of the Commission must be "academics," defined by DEAC 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 "administrators" defined by DEAC as a person currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in the administration of an institution."

At its Annual Business Meeting, the DEAC members elect directors from the

ranks of accredited members to replace those whose terms of office expire that year. Public members are appointed by the Board of Directors to replace public members whose terms expire.

When an unexpected vacancy occurs by reason of resignation or otherwise, or when a Commission member from an accredited institution is no longer currently active in academic or administrative functions, the Chair of the Commission will declare the position vacant, and the Chair will appoint a qualified individual to fill the position, who will thereby start his/her own first term upon taking his/her seat on the Commission.

By custom, the Chair of the Board of Directors is a public Commissioner who has at least two years of service remaining on his or her term. Normally, a Chair does not serve more than three years as the Chair. Also by custom, the Vice Chair has at least two years of service remaining on his or her term. Normally, a Vice Chair does not serve more than three years as the Vice Chair.

C. QUALIFICATIONS OF COMMISSIONERS

Public Commissioners: Public Commissioners are selected from diversified fields and backgrounds to include, insofar as possible, representatives from government, industry, business, finance, and education.

In seeking individuals to be recommended for appointment to the Board of Directors, the DEAC Nominating Committee considers individuals whose qualifications and experience will provide expertise that would best help the Commission deal with special areas of institution evaluation (i.e., finance, administration, management, curriculum, etc.).

In addition to the above, the following informal guidelines will be considered in appointing Public Commissioners from outside the distance study field:

1. Personal qualities of leadership, integrity, ability, and personal reputation; and
2. Formal education—earning one or more appropriately accredited academic degrees.

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 DEAC or has applied for such accreditation; 2) a member of any organization that transacts business with or receives any funding or payments from DEAC; or 3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in 1) or 2) above.

Institution Commissioners: Institution Commissioners are selected from DEAC-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.

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

In addition to the above, the following informal guidelines are considered in appointing Commissioners from the distance study institution field:

1. The personal qualities of leadership, integrity, ability, and personal reputation;
2. Formal education—holding one or more appropriately accredited academic degrees;
3. Experience in the distance study field with a contemporary knowledge of the field;
4. Demonstrated supportiveness of the accrediting program;
5. Experience as a member of Accrediting Examining Committees; and
6. Interest in and support of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission as evidenced by regular attendance at DEAC functions and personal as well as institutional participation on committees and at DEAC workshops, conferences, and other events.

All Commissioners must have an interest and willingness to serve and should be able to devote the time to do the necessary reading and background preparation and attend all Commission meetings so that they can serve effectively.

D. RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMISSIONERS

The Commissioners have the following responsibilities consistent with the DEAC Bylaws. The Commission's responsibilities are:

1. Establish, implement, and promulgate standards and policies reflecting the qualities of sound and reputable distance education and training institutions and determine effective procedures and administrative guidelines for evaluating distance education and training institutions seeking DEAC accreditation.
2. Receive and act upon applications for accreditation and reaccreditation from distance education institutions, evaluate new programs submitted for approval, decide the merits of any petitions from institutions, and oversee an ongoing program that ensures all standards and policies are effective, current, and compliant with existing requirements for a recognized accrediting association.
3. Conduct an institutional accreditation program that is compliant with extant federal and CHEA-adopted recognition criteria for nationally recognized accrediting associations.

4. Review the reports of evaluation committees and all other pertinent materials, including the Self-Evaluation Report, and, acting as a joint body of decision makers, accredit, deny, or withdraw accreditation from accredited institutions or order a Show Cause. In cases where accreditation is withdrawn or denied, the institution will be given the reasons for the adverse decision and will be given the opportunity of appealing the adverse decision before it becomes final.
5. Re-evaluate accredited institutions at reasonable intervals.
6. Exercise such other powers and duties as are necessary to carry out the functions of a nationally recognized accrediting association.

E. TRAINING OF COMMISSIONERS

Commissioners must successfully complete DEAC's online course entitled, "DEAC Evaluator's Training Program," before attending their first Commission meeting. In addition to the online training course, DEAC's staff provides an annual training seminar. All Commissioners are required to attend this seminar. Items covered during this seminar include the mission and goals of DEAC; the history, traditions, and culture of the commission; the accreditation process and how Accrediting Commission meetings are conducted; how applications are processed, from start to finish; duties and obligations of Commission members; how the Commission makes decisions; enforcement of timelines; ethics, conflicts of interest, confidentiality of the process and legal issues; appeals panel role and function; and how to execute Commissioners duties and stay current. Recusals are addressed in the conflicts of interest session.

All Commissioners are also required to occasionally participate in an on-site evaluation as an observer. DEAC provides additional training through its workshops and webinars, which the Commissioners routinely participate in or attend. Commissioners also keep current on any changes to DEAC's standards, policies, or procedures through information provided in DEAC's numerous publications and through its website postings.

F. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Each Commissioner is required to review, sign, and abide by the DEAC Conflict of Interest Policy each January. Each Commission must also review, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form before each Commission meeting. These forms are kept on file or stored electronically at the DEAC office in Washington, D.C.

V. SELECTING AND TRAINING EVALUATORS

A. PROCEDURES FOR SELECTING AND TRAINING DEAC EVALUATORS

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission prides itself on attracting competent and knowledgeable individuals to serve as on-site evaluators and subject specialists. The selection of evaluators and subject specialist reviewers is based upon the judgment of the director of accreditation acting under the established guidelines of this policy. Each on-site team has academic and administrative personnel represented.

B. ON-SITE EVALUATORS

The Commission trains and uses top executives and other staff from accredited institutions as on-site evaluators, as well as highly qualified academic experts from other accredited higher education institutions and from other sectors of society. In the vast majority of cases, each examining committee is comprised the CEOs or senior executive officers of accredited institutions, thus ensuring an authentic “peer review” from the ranks of the most highly respected practitioners in the field.

Evaluators are also selected from among accredited public and private institution educators, executives, and practitioners in business, technical, and service fields. Evaluation teams are made up of a mix of educators and practitioners. Some of the evaluators are retired persons who have otherwise remained active in their field of expertise.

As an added safeguard to ensure against potential or perceived conflicts in the selection of visiting evaluators, applicant institutions receive an examination schedule containing the names and affiliations of visiting evaluators and short biographies on each evaluator. The institutions then have an opportunity to discuss any specific objections they may have to a particular evaluator. In the case where an expressed objection is found to be valid, the executive director will appoint another evaluator to take the place of the evaluator who had been questioned.

To become a qualified examiner, one must complete an online or paper-based training program entitled *DEAC Evaluator Training Program* and receive a certificate of completion. The Accrediting Commission maintains a record of the qualifications of people who have been trained as on-site evaluators through this training program.

Before new evaluators are asked to serve on an on-site team, they must:

1. Have demonstrated expertise, ability, and accomplishment in the area they are selected to examine;
2. Read, agree to abide by, and sign the DEAC Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators, which includes reading, agreeing to abide by, and signing DEAC’s Conflict of Interest Policy and Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Form (see below); and

3. Have completed the training program, *DEAC Evaluator Training Program*.

In selecting evaluators for visits, the director of accreditation considers the nature of the institution being visited, the methods of operation unique to the institution, the nature of the program(s) offered, and the expertise and past examining experience of the evaluator. For visits to degree-granting institutions, a subject specialist is always included. These evaluators must possess an academic degree that is in a similar field and one higher than the degrees being offered by the institution, or the relevant terminal degree.

C. SUBJECT SPECIALIST

Special care is given to select professionals for subject specialists who are current and knowledgeable in their area of expertise (i.e., evaluation of curriculum content that reflects up-to-date technologies and skills). The vast majority of subject matter experts come to the Commission from regionally accredited institutions of higher learning, often by personal recommendation of the executive officers of higher education associations, e.g., the American Council on Education or any of the regional accrediting associations. The various specialized accrediting associations offer a rich source of potential qualified subject specialist evaluators. DEAC makes effective use of its working relationships with the various accrediting bodies to obtain and build an extensive roster of highly qualified experts.

To be selected as a subject specialist, the Commission asks that the person evidence no bias against the distance education method or no conflict of interest with the institution. For vocational courses, special care is given in selecting current practitioners who are working in the field of study. As discussed above, for degree programs, the subject specialists must have the appropriate academic degrees from an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Typically, the subject specialist must have a degree that is one higher than the degree being evaluated or the appropriate terminal degree. The degrees must be related to the degrees being evaluated. For doctorate degrees, the evaluator must have the same doctorate degree and have practiced in the field for several years before he or she would be considered for the evaluation.

To become a qualified subject specialist, one must complete the training program entitled *DEAC Evaluator Training Program* and receive a certificate of completion. The Accrediting Commission maintains a record of the qualifications of people who have been trained as subject specialists through this training program.

The duty of a subject specialist is to determine if curriculum materials offered by the institution are complete, accurate, and up to date in light of the stated objectives of the course. The subject specialist must judge whether the course is of good quality and whether it meets the published standards of the Accrediting Commission. For credit-bearing courses, the subject specialists must be able to judge the comparability of curricula to in-residence programs.

Subject specialists are used for evaluating courses off site and on site. The Commission's *Guide for Subject Specialist Evaluators* on DEAC's website describes the responsibilities for both types of reviewers. Each subject specialist is given the appropriate rating forms.

For visits to degree-granting institutions, a subject specialist is always appointed to the on-site committee visiting the institution. When a subject specialist accompanies an on-site team to the institution, he/she is able to follow up on questions related to the course materials by examining the institution's procedures for offering its educational programs.

DEAC staff is available to answer any questions from subject specialists concerning the accreditation standards, policies, and procedures.

D. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Every evaluator and subject specialist must read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form before reviewing any institution and its program as part of the accreditation process. In addition, on-site evaluators and subject specialist must also read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators.

E. FUNCTIONS OF EVALUATING TEAM MEMBERS

The following outlines the roles and responsibilities for each evaluating team member.

1. Readiness Assessment Evaluator

- Reviews institution's initial Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits
- Submits report to the director of accreditation and determines if the institution is ready for an on-site visit.

2. Chair

- Coordinates visit
- Ensures that evaluators complete their tasks during the on-site visit
- Sets date for report submission
- Prepares Chair's Report
- Submits Chair's Report to the director of accreditation

3. Education Evaluator

- Evaluates institution's compliance with accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
- Submits report to the Chair and the director of accreditation
- Verifies special areas through documentation and interviews:
 - Institutional mission
 - Institutional effectiveness and strategic planning
 - Program outcomes, curricula, and materials
 - Educational and student support services
 - Student achievement and satisfaction
 - Academic leadership and faculty qualifications
 - Admissions practices

- Reviews comments from subject specialists
- Handles special concern by reviewing:
 - Student surveys and/or complaints
 - Curricula and online platforms
 - 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

4. Business Evaluator

- Evaluates institution's compliance with accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
- Submits report to the Chair and director of accreditation
- Verifies special areas through documentation and interviews:
 - Enrollment agreements
 - Financial disclosures, cancellations, and refund policies
 - Institutional governance
 - Financial responsibility
 - Facilities, equipment, supplies, record protection and retention
- Handles special concerns by reviewing:
 - Financial statements
 - Enrollment agreements
 - Refund policies
 - Catalog, advertisements, and website
 - Facilities, equipment, supplies, and record protection

5. Degree Program Evaluator

- Evaluates accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
- Submits report to the Chair and director of accreditation
- Reviews subject specialists' comments
- Handles special concerns by reviewing:
 - Program outcomes, curricula, and instructional materials
 - Faculty qualifications
 - Student/faculty ratios
 - Credit hour policy and data

6. Subject Specialists

- Evaluates accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
- Submits report to the Chair and director of accreditation
- Reviews curricula, assignments/examinations, student/faculty interaction

- Interviews faculty/instructors and students

7. DEAC Staff Member

- Coordinates schedules and logistics
- Answers questions concerning accreditation standards and procedures

8. State Agency Observer

- Participates as a full member of the on-site team
- Provides pertinent information from state files
- Observes institution's evaluation and accreditation process
- Files comments to DEAC (optional)

VI. SELECTING AND TRAINING APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS

A. PROCEDURES FOR SELECTING AND TRAINING DEAC APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS

Part Two, Section XII of the DEAC *Accreditation Handbook* states that an institution may appeal a decision by the Accrediting Commission to deny or withdraw accreditation. This policy details the process of selecting the members of the appeals panel, their responsibilities, and training.

B. APPEALS PROCESS

An institution's appeal is heard by an independent appeals panel that is separate from the Commission and serves as an additional level of due process for the institution. The appeals panel has no authority concerning the reasonableness or appropriateness of eligibility criteria, policies, procedures, or accreditation standards. The panel is not empowered to overrule the Commission by imposing its own determinations on what the panel believes should constitute adequate procedures, institution response times, or other administrative policies promulgated by the Commission. It can only affirm, amend, remand, or reverse a prior **decision** of the Commission as set forth below. Its role is to determine whether the Commission's adverse action was not supported by the record or was clearly erroneous. The institutions, both initial applicants and accredited institutions, always have the burden of proof in demonstrating that an adverse action of the Commission was not supported by the record or was otherwise erroneous.

C. PROCESS FOR SELECTION OF AN APPEALS PANEL MEMBER

The process of selecting and vetting a person to serve on the appeals panel begins with the Commission selecting from a pool of candidates meeting the criteria below.

The appeals panel will consist of three people appointed by the Accrediting Commission. One will represent the public interest, one will represent academic/education interests, and one will be a distance education institution administrator/executive. Potential members of appeals panels will be selected from the ranks of former members of the Accrediting Commission, the corps of Commission evaluators, and active staff of DEAC-accredited institutions who have completed the DEAC evaluator training program. All panelists are subject to DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and are vetted to assure that they are free from any subject matter bias before being selected for a particular appeal.

The Commission selects three people to serve on the appeals panel: a public member, an academic, and an administrator. Once the Commission appoints the three people and they accept, the executive director submits the names and qualifications of the appeals panel members to the institution in advance. An institution has 10 days from the receipt of the panel members' names to object on the basis of possible conflict of interest as described in DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy. If the Commission determines that a conflict exists, the panelist is replaced. No panel member may serve if he/she participated, in any respect, in the

underlying decision by the Accrediting Commission to deny or withdraw the accreditation of the institution

D. TRAINING OF APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS

Once the appeals panel members are chosen, DEAC works with the institution and the panel members to set a date for the appeal hearing. In preparation for hearing the institution's appeal, the panel members are sent the documentation needed to perform their tasks. The panel members are briefed by DEAC's executive director and legal counsel on their responsibilities and duties. An outside mediator may or may not be brought in to conduct the appeals hearing. The consideration of the appeal is based upon the Commission's written findings and reasons related to the action, the institution's written response detailing grounds for appeal, and relevant supportive documents.

The appeals panel members are told the date, time, and place of the appeals hearing. They are also provided an agenda of the meeting, which contains of the names and titles of the people attending the hearing. DEAC staff works with panel members to arrange for transportation and hotel accommodations, which DEAC pays for.

The institution must set forth the specific grounds for its appeal and state the reasons the institution believes the adverse decision should be set aside or revised. In making its appeal, the institution has the burden to show that the Commission's decision resulted from errors or omissions in the execution of Commission policies and procedures, or that the decision was arbitrary or capricious and was not based on substantial evidence on the record. No new materials may be presented for the appeals panel's consideration on appeal.

E. RESPONSIBILITY AND DUTIES OF THE APPEALS PANEL MEMBERS

The appeals panel members shall have the following responsibilities, consistent with DEAC policies and procedures:

1. when appointed to the appeals panel, s/he must read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and sign the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form. These forms must be submitted to DEAC within 10 days after agreeing to serve on an appeals panel;
2. exercise due diligence in becoming familiar with, and an authority on, DEAC standards, policies, and procedures, and participate in all training sessions conducted by DEAC's staff;
3. agree to review all documentation pertinent to the institution's appeal;
4. treat all information obtained through the institution's participation in the appeal process as confidential, and do not disclose such information to parties other than the DEAC staff and legal counsel;

5. direct any inquiries s/he may have, or request for additional information after the appeal hearing to the DEAC executive director;
6. state no opinion or prediction concerning possible actions the Commission may take as a result of the appeal hearing; and
7. exercise such powers and duties as are necessary to carry out the functions of a DEAC appeals panel.

VII. OBLIGATIONS OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation brings with it a number of obligations for the institution. An accredited institution must continue to meet all accreditation standards. The institution must continue to justify the confidence placed in it by DEAC and improve itself in all areas. Accredited institutions are obligated to:

A. FILE AN ANNUAL REPORT

Each accredited institution is required to file an Annual Report form to the Commission. The institution must advise the Commission of significant changes since its initial or last renewal of accreditation cycle. An institution is assessed a late fee if its Annual Report is not submitted by January 31. As part of the Annual Report, the institution must report its data on course completion and program graduation rates. The institution must also submit data on students' satisfaction as demonstrated by the percentage of students who answer affirmatively to the three mandatory DEAC questions.

B. PAY ANNUAL DUES AND ACCREDITATION FEES

An accredited institution is charged an annual accreditation fee to sustain the accreditation process. As a member of DEAC, each member institution is charged annual dues. These dues support the research and professional activities of DEAC. The dues and fees are based on annual tuition receipts. An institution must submit a completed "Computation for Dues and Fees Form." 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 30 are charged a late fee. An accredited institution failing to meet its financial obligations to DEAC by September 30 is subject to a special accreditation visit.

C. TEACH-OUT COMMITMENT

The institution should 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. The institution should update the Teach-Out Commitment and send it to the Commission when there are changes in the institution's ownership, management, or location. Institutions must also submit a Teach-Out Plan, if required.

D. NEW AND REVISED COURSES

The institution must inform the Commission whenever it adds or revises a course/program.

E. CORRECT ANY INCORRECT OR MISLEADING INFORMATION

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 Commission with respect to the institution.

F. MAINTAIN PROPER LICENSURES, AUTHORIZATIONS, OR APPROVALS

An accredited institution may not retain accreditation if it is not properly licensed,

authorized, or approved by the applicable state educational oversight authority. Each accredited institution must conform to all the provisions of applicable laws and regulations.

G. ADVISE COMMISSION IN A TIMELY MANNER

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.

H. ADVISE COMMISSION OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

It is the duty of the Commission to make certain that any substantive change an accredited institution makes does not adversely affect its capacity to continue to meet DEAC's accreditation standards. An institution must obtain the Commission's approval before the change in the institution's scope of accreditation is granted.

I. PARTICIPATE IN ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

An institution should encourage its staff and faculty to actively participate in DEAC's accreditation process as one opportunity for professional development. The Commission conducts training sessions through its online course entitled *DEAC Evaluator Training Program*. Peer-reviewers receive instructions on being effective evaluators.

J. RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

An accredited institution must take the steps necessary to renew its accreditation at least every five years (three years following initial accreditation). After this time, without affirmative action by the Commission to continue the renewal of an institution's accreditation, the accreditation expires as of the date determined by the Commission. DEAC staff sends the institution a reminder to submit its application for accreditation by the date specified. Once the institution is granted renewal of accreditation, the DEAC staff issues a new accreditation certificate citing the original date of accreditation and the renewal of accreditation date.

K. 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 DEAC, the Commission may order a special visit.

VIII. **DEAC CODE OF ETHICS FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL**

A recruitment representative is someone who enrolls prospective students, including, but not limited to, telephone marketers, enrollment advisors, and admission representatives.

- A. As a student recruitment representative of an accredited distance education institution, I recognize that I have certain responsibilities toward students, the public, and my institution. To fulfill these responsibilities, I pledge adherence to this Code of Ethics.
- B. I will observe fully the accreditation standards, rules, policies, procedures, and guidelines established by my institution, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, the state education agency, and other legally authorized agencies.
- C. I will adhere to high ethical standards in the conduct of my work, and to the best of my ability, will:
 - 1. Observe fully the rights of all applicants and commit no action that would be detrimental to any applicant's opportunity to enroll because of race, sex, color, creed, or national origin.
 - 2. Never knowingly make any false or misleading representation to any applicant or use any coercive practices in presenting information.
 - 3. Enroll applicants only in the course or courses in which they have expressed their interest, provided they meet the qualifications and standards established by my institution for enrollment.
 - 4. Provide applicants only with information authorized by my institution regarding the occupational opportunities for graduates, and never make claims guaranteeing employment, job promotion prospects, or income increases to an applicant.
 - 5. State accurately and clearly to prospective students the approvals, accreditation, business and employer recognition, and course acceptance accorded to my institution.
 - 6. Provide only full and accurate information on the transferability of academic credits and acceptance of degrees or credentials by other educational institutions, and disclose affirmatively the fact that the acceptance of credits and degrees is entirely the prerogative of the receiving institution and acceptance cannot be guaranteed.
 - 7. Provide prospective applicants only complete and accurate information on the total financial obligation they will be incurring prior to accepting their enrollment application.
 - 8. Provide students prior to enrolling complete and accurate information about

financing options for students, and answer any questions.

9. Never use tuition assistance available from a government agency or other source as the primary inducement for enrollment.
10. Refrain at all times from making any statement or inference that might falsely impugn the integrity or value of any other institution, method of training, or profession.
11. Discharge faithfully, and to the best of my ability, all of the duties and obligations and procedures established by my institution for my position and know all of my obligations and obligations as an institutional representative.
12. Reflect at all times the highest credit upon myself, my institution, and the field of distance education, and always strive to enhance the reputation of my profession through my conduct as an institutional representative.

IX. ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

A. Prospective students whose native language is not English and who have not earned a degree from an appropriately accredited institution where English is the principal language of instruction must demonstrate college-level proficiency in English through one of the following for admission:

1. **Undergraduate Degree:** A minimum total score of **57** on the paper-delivered Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL PBT), or **61** on the Internet Based Test (iBT); **6.0** on the International English Language Test (IELTS); **44** on the Pearson Test of English Academic Score Report; **95** on the Duolingo English Test; or **53** on the 4-skill Michigan English Test (MET), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE).

A high school diploma completed at an accredited/recognized high school (where the medium of instruction is English).

2. **Master's Degree:** A minimum total score of **60** on the paper-delivered Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL PBT), or **71** on the Internet Based Test (iBT); **6.5** on the International English Language Test (IELTS); **50** on the Pearson Test of English Academic Score Report; **100** on the Duolingo English Test; or **55** on the 4-skill Michigan English Test (MET), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE).
3. **First Professional Degree or Professional Doctoral Degree:** A minimum score of **65** on the paper-delivered Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL PBT), or **80** on the Internet Based Test (iBT); **6.5** on the International English Language Test (IELTS); **58** on the Pearson Test of English Academic Score Report; **105** on the Duolingo English Test; or **55** on the 4-skill Michigan English Test (MET), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE).
4. A minimum score on the College Board Accuplacer ESL Exam Series as follows:

ESL Language Use: Score of 85
ESL Listening: Score of 80
ESL Reading: Score of 85
ESL Sentence Meaning: Score of 90
ESL Writeplacer: Score of 4
Comprehensive Score for all exams of 350

5. A minimum grade of Pre-1 on the Eiken English Proficiency Exam;
 6. A minimum B-2 English proficiency level identified within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standards and assessed through various ESOL examinations, including the University of Cambridge;
 7. A transcript indicating completion of at least 30 semester credit hours with an average grade of “C” or higher at an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), or accepted foreign equivalent that is listed in the International Handbook of Universities where the language of instruction was English. An average grade of B or higher is required for the master’s degree, first professional degree, or professional doctoral degree.
- B. Transcripts not in English must be evaluated by an appropriate third party and translated into English or evaluated by a trained transcript evaluator fluent in the language on the transcript. In this case, the evaluator must have expertise in the educational practices of the country of origin and include an English translation of the review.

X. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BENCHMARKS

The degree program benchmarks are set forth in the table below. DEAC is continuing with its historical practice of setting graduation rate benchmarks at approximately 15 points below the average for the total number of students in all institutions at each degree level. Data are collected from DEAC-accredited institutions as a baseline for the use of empirical, quantitative measures of institutional effectiveness and improvement strategies that focus on distance education. DEAC reviews the data it receives each year in annual report submissions from accredited institutions to determine if adjustments are needed. This practice is intended to accommodate both annual fluctuations within institutions and variable factors across institutions and programs.

	<i>Average Graduation Rate</i>	<i>Graduation Rate</i>
Associate Degree Programs		
<i>Distance Education</i>	47%	32%
<i>Correspondence/Competency-Based</i>	28%	*
Bachelor's Degree Programs	58%	43%
Master's Degree Programs	69%	54%
First Professional Degree Programs	77%	62%
Doctoral Degree Programs	55%	40%

**The Commission does not set a benchmark at 15 points below the average. However, it recognizes that different factors could fairly account for an institution reporting a rate below the 28% average. Accordingly, with respect to institutions reporting a lower rate, the Commission will conduct a secondary analysis of individual course completion rates, evaluation of student portfolios, and other information that would reasonably demonstrate institutional effectiveness.*

Data on student persistence and completion in shorter-term, non-degree educational programs offered at DEAC-accredited institutions are submitted and reviewed on an annual basis. Based upon a longitudinal review of these data, DEAC continues to set a completion rate benchmark at 60 percent for these programs.

	<i>Average Completion Rate</i>	<i>Completion Rate</i>
Non-degree Programs	80%	60%

DEAC values other quantifiable means of evaluating institutional effectiveness. Institutions may provide data on their IPEDS outcomes measures, IPEDS graduation rates, or National Student Clearinghouse Total Completion Rates in addition to data reported directly to the DEAC.

XI. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SATISFACTION

A. ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

When an institution undergoes initial or renewal of accreditation, it must provide in its Self-Evaluation Report (SER) both a formal written Outcomes Assessment Plan for regularly conducting student learning outcomes assessments for all of its courses/programs and documentation that it follows the plan. The institution's Outcomes Assessment Plan must also include documentation on how student learning outcomes data is used to assess institutional outcomes, goals, and strategic initiatives. Each accredited institution must confirm that it meets this requirement in its Annual Report to the Commission and by providing a narrative on its continuous improvement results.

The institution must demonstrate and document in its Self-Evaluation Report through results of learning outcomes assessments that students achieve learning outcomes that are appropriate to its mission and to the rigor and depth of the degrees or certificates offered. The institution must also describe how its Outcomes Assessment Plan has contributed to the improvement of the institution over time and explain how the plan demonstrates that the institution is fulfilling its stated mission. The institution must demonstrate that it uses evidence of student learning to gauge the effectiveness of the educational practices and methodologies through its institutional effectiveness planning efforts. This data should also be used to identify and implement strategies for improving student learning. It is not enough for an institution to simply collect data. The institution must demonstrate that the evidence is analyzed and drives curricular and institutional improvements.

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. An institution's Outcomes Assessment Plan should communicate 1) what the institution wants students to be able to do or know, 2) how it knows the students achieved these outcomes, and 3) how the institution will use the information received to improve teaching and learning. An Outcomes Assessment Plan should begin with a solid set of learning outcomes that are quantifiable, realistic, and measurable.

The institution's Outcomes Assessment Plan should describe the different areas assessed, the methods of assessment and when they are used, and how it interprets and uses the results. The institution must use both direct and indirect measures of outcomes learning assessments to show achievement of course and program outcomes, and provide documented evidence that shows that the results are used to improve programs, curricula, instruction, faculty development, and support services.

B. PERCEIVED STUDENT SATISFACTION

The institution documents that students are satisfied with the instructional and educational services provided. DEAC evaluates student responses to survey questions designed by the Commission as a part of the DEAC accreditation process. Students in DEAC-accredited institutions fit a profile, and most are older and maintain other personal and professional commitments. They are adequate judges of whether the

program delivered what it promised. The institution should regularly survey students, at a minimum annually, using questions designed to elicit the measure of satisfaction. The institution should establish a baseline. The Commission developed three questions to be asked randomly of students. For each course and program offered by an institution, three of every four students responding to a random survey must answer positively about their experiences.

C. PROGRESS THROUGH THE COURSE/PROGRAM

The institution documents that students complete their studies at rates that compare favorably to those of courses/programs offered by similar DEAC-accredited institutions or benchmarks set by the Commission. See Appendix X.

D. OTHER INFORMATION CONSIDERED

In determining whether an institution undergoing its initial or renewal of accreditation meets Standard V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction, the Commission considers the direct evidence of the results of its own survey of students using the DEAC Student Survey Form. An institution must submit 100 names (labels for correspondence institutions) with their application form. If an institution has more than one division (e.g., vocational or academic degrees), it must submit 100 names from each division.

The on-site evaluators and the Commission will review the student surveys to evaluate the institution's performance. The survey results from the Commission-administered student survey will be compared to those of institution-administered surveys to establish the validity of the institution's survey results.

The Commission will also consider evidence from: 1) analysis of student complaints received about the institution, 2) information solicited in a survey that the Commission sends to state and federal agencies, consumer agencies, and Better Business Bureaus, and 3) any other data or information it encounters about the institution, regardless of its source.

If the institution feels that it cannot adequately and fairly fulfill the reporting requirements as described above, it may suggest other ways of providing evidence that it meets Standard V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction. The Commission will make a determination on a case-by-case basis if the institution's methods of providing evidence are acceptable for meeting Standard V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction.

E. COMMISSION'S REVIEW

The Commission will review the data supplied in the institution's Annual Report and will compare the completion and graduation rates with similar institutions offering similar courses/programs and degree levels. To make the comparison, the DEAC staff will determine which institutions and programs are similar. For institutions undergoing initial or renewal of accreditation, the on-site evaluators and subject specialists will review the information in the Self-Evaluation Report and make the comparison with Commission-supplied data.

To be considered a “favorable comparison,” a course or program must not fall below 15 points of the mean completion rate for similar courses or programs for the institution’s assigned peer group. The graduation rates for degree programs will be compared with graduation rates for similar degree levels (e.g., associate, bachelor’s, master’s, first professional, and professional doctorate).

If the Commission’s analysis does not show that the institution’s data compares favorably with those of similar DEAC-accredited institutions, the institution must provide a written explanation of its data and how they were gathered, and the Commission will review the institution’s explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate. Such action may include 1) accepting the institution’s explanations and taking no further action, 2) determining that the institution may no longer offer the course/program in its present form, and/or 3) ordering the institution to undergo a full reaccreditation review if the institution does not make the appropriate changes.

F. ANNUAL REPORTING OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT RESULTS

The institution in its Annual Report is required to provide a narrative on its activities or improvements which were made during the reporting year based directly on the results of its outcomes assessment efforts. These institutional changes or improvements can be minor or major, depending on the data collected.

G. CONCLUSION

The Commission will judge the acceptability of the case an institution makes for meeting Standard V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction by reviewing all of the evidence and the thoroughness, clarity, and adequacy of the documentation presented in the Self-Evaluation Report and Annual Report.

When an institution is undergoing its initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation, the on-site evaluators will review and evaluate the information provided by the Commission and by the institution against the minimum levels of acceptance described above. They will also determine if there are any extenuating circumstances that should be considered in the case of an institution whose performance falls below minimum acceptable levels.

If the Commission’s analysis shows that the institution’s outcomes data do not meet the prescribed minimum acceptable levels, the institution must provide a written explanation, and the Commission will review the institution’s explanation and take whatever follow-up action it deems appropriate.

Evidence provided by the institution must be relevant, verifiable, representative, and cumulative. It may not be modified to produce a desired outcome. The burden of proof is always on the institution to provide evidence that it meets Standard V. Student Achievement and Satisfaction.

XII. PILOT PROGRAMS

The DEAC will consider suspension of certain policies and grant approval to a limited number of applicants which propose innovative pilot programs that contribute to strengthening the institution and its education and training and benefit its students. The Commission may use the experience gained from such pilot projects to adjust and improve its accrediting programs.

A. ELIGIBILITY

An applicant for a pilot program must be accredited by the DEAC. An applicant for a pilot program must be an institution in good standing with DEAC, and its proposed pilot program must also be in compliance with federal, state, and local law.

B. APPLICATION

The Commission will consider an application for a pilot program in accordance with the educational significance of the proposal and the potential for contribution to the development of education and training and of accreditation standards. A determination by the Commission not to accept an application for a pilot program will be without prejudice to its resubmission at a later time or to the institution's current accredited status.

An applicant for a pilot program must submit the following:

1. A narrative statement demonstrating the applicant's eligibility and alignment with its mission and describing the pilot program in detail. This narrative should indicate the specific accreditation standards for which a waiver is requested. The narrative should include a description of the specific objectives sought to be accomplished and an explanation of how the pilot program will strengthen the institution, contribute to the development of its education and training, and benefit students.
2. A statement of the length of time necessary to implement the pilot program proposal and to assess its effectiveness. This statement should explain the basis of the institution's projections.
3. A demonstration that the faculty, instructional material, equipment, and facilities that will be used in conjunction with the pilot program are sufficient to meet the objectives of the proposal. This demonstration must include staff and faculty personnel reports for all persons who will act in an instructional or administrative capacity in the pilot program and a detailed description of the instructional materials, equipment, and facilities that may be used.
4. A projection of the number of students expected to enroll and complete the training and the basis for the applicant's projections.
5. An explanation of how the applicant will recruit and admit students, assure

that students are fully and accurately informed about the education/training to be provided, and determine that students have the capability to benefit from and succeed at the education/training. The institution must demonstrate that students' health, safety, and welfare will be protected.

6. A plan that describes the funding for the pilot program and demonstrates that the applicant is able to support and complete the pilot program.
7. A certification statement, signed by the applicant, that the information included in the application for a pilot program is true and correct.

C. EVALUATION

Upon the receipt of the above information, the Commission will require an on-site visit to verify the information supplied and to develop a further understanding of the pilot program. The findings of the evaluator(s) will be set forth in a report that will be provided to the applicant and the Commission. The applicant will have the opportunity to respond to the report.

D. COMMISSION REVIEW

Upon consideration of the information provided, the findings and assessment described in "Evaluation" above, and the applicant's response to the findings, the Commission may grant approval for the proposed pilot program if it finds that the program can be reasonably expected to strengthen the institution and its education and training and benefit its students. The Commission reserves the right to limit the duration of the pilot program and the number of students who will be allowed to participate. The Commission may establish such other terms and conditions upon any approval granted under the pilot program as it deems appropriate. The Commission will establish an appropriate fee to cover the costs associated with each pilot program.

XIII. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WARRANT WAIVERS OF DEAC STANDARDS & PROCEDURES

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission reserves the right to grant waivers of its standards, policies, procedures and timeframes when special circumstances warrant such waivers, for a period of time as determined by DEAC annually, and not to exceed three years unless DEAC determines there is good cause to extend the period of time, and if—

- A. DEAC and the institution can show that the circumstances requiring the period of noncompliance are beyond the institution's control, such as—
 - 1. A natural disaster or other catastrophic event significantly impacting an institution's or program's operations.
 - 2. Accepting students from another institution that is implementing a teach-out or closing.
 - 3. Significant and documented local or national economic changes, such as an economic recession or closure of a large local employer.
 - 4. Changes relating to State licensure requirements.
 - 5. The normal application of the agency's standards creates an undue hardship on students, or
 - 6. Instructors who do not meet the agency's typical faculty standards, but who are otherwise qualified by education or work experience, to teach courses within a dual or concurrent enrollment program, as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7801, or career and technical education courses.
- B. The grant of the period of noncompliance is approved by DEAC's decision-making body,
- C. DEAC projects that the institution or program has the resources necessary to achieve compliance with the standard, policy, or procedure postponed within the time allotted,
and
- D. The institution or program demonstrates to the satisfaction of DEAC that the period of noncompliance will not—
 - 1. Contribute to the cost of the program to the student without the student's consent;
 - 2. Create any undue hardship on, or harm to, students; or
 - 3. Compromise the program's academic quality.

GLOSSARY

ACADEMIC

A member of an institution of learning, relating to education and scholarship.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

A series of courses designed to lead to a degree, diploma, or certificate credential in a defined field of study or occupation. Academic programs are guided by specific program outcomes.

ACCEPTED BEST PRACTICE

A technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has been proven to reliably lead to a desired or optimum result within an industry or profession.

ACCREDITATION

A voluntary, nongovernmental, peer-based form of quality assurance at the institutional level. Institutions demonstrate compliance with state, federal, and accreditation standards determined through initial and periodic evaluations in order to achieve accreditation.

ACRONYMS (COMMONLY USED IN HIGHER EDUCATION)

AACRAO	American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers
AA	Associate of Arts degree
AAS	Associate of Applied Science degree
AS	Associate of Science degree
BA	Bachelor of Arts degree
BS	Bachelor of Science degree
BSN	Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CEU	Continuing Education Unit
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CLEP	College Level Examination Program
DA	Doctor of Arts degree (specified fields)
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
DMin	Doctor of Ministry
DPA	Doctor of Public Administration
DPT	Doctor of Physical Therapy
DOT	Doctor of Occupational Therapy
DSc	Doctor of Science (specified fields)
EdD	Doctor of Education degree
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
GED	General Education Development
GPA	Grade Point Average

IPEDS	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
MA	Master of Arts degree
MBA	Master of Business Administration degree
MS	Master of Science degree
NACIQI	National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity
NCSARA	National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
USED	United States Department of Education

ACTIVE STUDENT

An enrolled student who has completed at least one assignment or examination, is making satisfactory progress, or has affirmed in writing an intent to continue studying.

ADDITIONAL LOCATION

Per Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 34 §602: a facility that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution and at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of a program and may qualify as a branch campus.

ADMINISTRATIVE SITE

A separate office located geographically apart from the main headquarters location, which typically provides an off-site workplace for the convenience of institution officials who do not live near the headquarters. Neither educational programs nor instructional services to students are offered from an administrative site.

ADMINISTRATOR

An individual who manages an institution of learning.

ASSESSMENT (OF STUDENT LEARNING)

An ongoing, iterative process consisting of defining learning outcomes, choosing a method or approach, gathering evidence of learning, analyzing and interpreting the evidence, and using the results to improve student learning.

ASSIGNMENT

A specific task or amount of work performed by a student and submitted for evaluation.

ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS

Cooperation between two or more institutions to facilitate the transfer of students' credit or other predetermined collaboration.

ASYNCHRONOUS

Instructional communication or interaction that does not occur at the same time, place, or rate.

AVOCATIONAL

Courses or programs designed for personal academic enhancement or professional development.

BENCHMARK

A point of reference or standard in relation to which something can be compared and judged. A specific level of student performance may serve as the benchmark that students are expected to meet at a particular point in time or developmental level. Retention and graduation rates may also be benchmarked against those of peer institutions or national norms.

BRANCH CAMPUS

Per Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 34 §602: an additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. The Secretary considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if the location (1) Is permanent in nature; (2) Offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential; (3) Has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and (4) Has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

CANCELLATION

The process of withdrawing a student, refunding tuition and fees owed to the student, and relieving the student and institution of further obligations.

CAPSTONE

A culminating project or experience, usually associated with undergraduate and graduate education, that generally takes place in the student's final year of study and requires review, synthesis, and application of what has been learned over the course of the student's instructional experience. The result may be a report, product, or performance. The capstone can provide evidence for assessment of a range of outcomes (e.g., core competencies, program outcomes, institution-level outcomes).

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Degree: Typically, certificate programs contain a collection of credit-bearing courses configured to equip students with specialized knowledge in a subject area with content that is less extensive than what is provided in an entire degree program.

Non-Degree: Certificate/diploma programs consist of modules or lessons that result in the award of a "certificate" or "diploma" at the completion of a course of study.

CHANGE IN LEGAL STATUS

A change in the legal definition of the company or corporation, which is typically defined by the state or United States government, such as changing from a for-profit to a nonprofit or from an S Corporation to an LLC.

CHANGE OF FORM OF CONTROL

The sale of all or a majority interest of the institution's assets, sale or assignment of the controlling interest of the voting stock of a corporation that owns the institution or that controls the institution through one or more subsidiaries, merger or consolidation of the institution with other institutions, or an independent corporation with a different

ownership. When an institution changes its form of control, defined as the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution, it is essentially changing ownership.

CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP

Any transaction or combination of transactions that would result in a change in the control of an accredited institution.

CIP CODES

The Classification of Instructional Programs provides a taxonomic scheme that supports the accurate tracking and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity.

CLOCK HOUR

One instructional hour defined as 50 minutes of instruction in a 60-minute period.

COMPETENCY

In assessment of student learning, a specific skill, body of knowledge, or disposition; can also refer to the student's ability to demonstrate that learning.

COMPLETION

Signifies a student met the requirements for an individual course, semester, or term.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

For purposes of this policy, a person with a conflict of interest is referred to as an "interested person." The following circumstances shall be deemed to create a conflict of interest:

- Ownership of some or all of an institution, its assets, or the stock of the company that owns or operates the institution;
- The holding of mortgages, liens, or other debt instruments or interest upon an institution or its assets;
- Having been employed, or currently employed, at the institution;
- Currently employed with a DEAC institution that competes with the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, as a consultant to the institution;
- Having served, or currently serving, on a board, advisory council, or committee of the institution;
- Having attended the institution as a student;
- Having financial interest (including holding stocks, etc.) in the institution or a business or enterprise that competes with DEAC;
- Having a close personal friend or family member at the institution; or
- Having accepted gifts, entertainment or other favors from individuals or entities (see below).

Other situations may create the appearance of a conflict, or present a duality of interests in connection with a person who has influence over the activities or finances of the DEAC.

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS (CEU)

A measurement of participation in non-credit professional development activities.

CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION

Education provided through one or more courses in which the institution provides instructional materials and examinations by mail or electronic transmission to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and substantive, and it is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education for the purposes of participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV funding programs.

COURSE

A learning experience of defined scope and duration, with intended learning outcomes, as described in a catalog or syllabus.

CREDIT HOURS

Semester and quarter hours are equivalent to the commonly accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement. Academic degrees or academic credit-bearing distance education courses are measured by the learning outcomes normally achieved through 45 hours of student work for one semester credit¹ or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit².

¹One credit/semester hour is 15 hours of academic engagement and 30 hours of preparation.

²One quarter hour credit is 10 hours of academic engagement and 20 hours of preparation.

CURRICULUM

Lessons, outcomes, and academic content taught in a specific course of study or academic program.

DEGREE

A title conferred on students by an institution on completion of a program of study.

DIPLOMA

A document bearing record of graduation from or of a degree conferred by an educational institution.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education defines distance education within the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 34 § 600.2. as follows:

Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors, and to support regular and substantive interaction between

the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include —

- 1. The internet;*
- 2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;*
- 3. Audio conferencing; or*
- 4. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition.*

For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by the institution's accrediting agency.

For purposes of this definition, substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following—

- 1. Providing direct instruction;*
- 2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;*
- 3. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;*
- 4. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency;*
or,
- 5. Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.*

An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency—

- 1. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and*
- 2. Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed, on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.*

DIVISION

Any name used by an institution to advertise its various courses or programs. A "division" is owned and operated by the parent institution and is not a separate legal entity.

DROP OUT

A student who withdraws or ceases attendance at an institution.

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Academic or vocational courses or programs.

EDUCATIONAL RECORDS

Records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational institution in accordance with applicable state and federal rules and regulations.

ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE

Symbols or other data in digital form attached to an electronically transmitted document as verification of the sender's intent to sign the document.

ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT (APPLICATION, CONTRACT)

Any agreement or other similar contractual document that creates or evidences an obligation binding a student to purchase educational offerings from an institution.

EXHIBITS

The required data, evidence, documents, and other items that are included as part of the Self-Evaluation Report and reviewed during initial and renewal of accreditation.

FACULTY

Instructional staff of an institution responsible for the design, delivery, and assessment of academic programs. The use of "faculty" does not typically include administrators, counselors, or other campus educators, (e.g., admissions representatives, student service personnel). Full-time faculty members are those whose primary employment obligation is to teaching and research at the institution. Part-time or adjunct faculty members may have continuing contracts and be involved in program development and review, governance, and other matters; or they may be assigned a specific number of courses with few or no other responsibilities to the institution. The institution is responsible for having clear policies on faculty roles and responsibilities.

FICE CODE

The six-digit institutional identifier that is assigned to each higher education (two-year or above) institution by the Federal Interagency Committee on Education and is used in all Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

At a minimum, the financial statements (audited or reviewed) must be comparative, include a letter of financial statement validation, CPA Opinion or Review Report, and also include the following

FOR-PROFIT INSTITUTIONS:

- Balance Sheet: reflecting assets, liabilities, and equity;
- Income Statement: reflecting revenues, expenses, and net income (loss);
- Statement of Cash Flows: reflecting the sources and uses of cash;
- Statement of Changes in Shareholders' Equity: showing activity in shareholders' equity for the periods presented; and

- Explanatory Notes: reflects all of the disclosures or footnotes required by generally accepted accounting principles.

NONPROFIT INSTITUTIONS:

- Statement of Financial Position: reflecting assets, liabilities, and net assets;
- Statement of Activities: reflecting revenues, expenses, and change in net assets;
- Statement of Cash Flows: reflecting the sources and uses of cash;
- Explanatory Notes: reflects all of the disclosures or footnotes required by generally accepted accounting principles.

FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

A degree that signifies both completion of the academic requirement for beginning practice in a given profession and a level of professional skill beyond that normally required for a bachelor's degree. This degree usually is based on a program requiring at least two academic years of work before entrance and a total of at least six academic years of work to complete the degree program, including both prior required college work and the professional program itself. By the National Center for Education Statistics definition, "First Professional degrees are awarded in the fields of dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.), medicine (M.D.), optometry (O.D.), osteopathic medicine (D.O.), pharmacy (D.Pharm.), pediatric medicine (D.P.M.), veterinary medicine (D.V.M.), chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.), law (LL.B. or J.D.) and theological professionals (M.Div. or M.H.L.)."

GOOD CAUSE

The Commission may, in its sole discretion and upon written request of an institution providing detailed grounds for its request, agree to extend the Deferral Period or Show Cause Remediation Period, as applicable, for good cause shown. An institution requesting an extension must provide evidence, in its request, that it has made substantial, good faith progress toward compliance with the requirements of the deferral notice or show cause directive and that granting the extension will not impose an unreasonable burden on or otherwise cause harm to students. A "good cause" extension may be allowed, for example, when an institution needs additional time to more fully document the scope and permanence of its compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or to establish an extended history of such compliance. A decision to grant a "good cause" extension may be made contingent on the institution's submission of interim reports on progress and related data. When the Commission grants a "good cause" extension, the time allowed for institutional compliance may exceed the permissible compliance times published in federal regulations. If the result of a "good cause" extension results in a Show Cause Remediation Period longer than that authorized by federal regulation, the Commission notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education of its decision and the reason for the same. A decision by the Commission not to grant a "good cause" extension is not appealable.

GRADING CRITERIA

A set of criteria and standards linked to outcomes that are used to assess a student's performance on assignments, assessments, or examinations. Rubrics are used by faculty in fairly and consistently measuring student performance.

GRADUATE

A student who has satisfied the prescribed requirements and been awarded a certificate, diploma, or degree.

GRADUATION

The act of successful completion of all program requirements resulting in receipt of a diploma or degree from an institution.

HYBRID COURSE

Instruction that combines face-to-face teaching and learning activities with distance education.

IN-RESIDENCE COMPONENT

Instruction that requires in-person delivery of curriculum, learning of certain manual skills, technical proficiency with specialized equipment, access to resources or the application of certain techniques under professional supervision. In-residence components must not exceed 49% of a DEAC-approved program.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Intellectual property rights are the rights given to persons over the creations of their minds. They usually give the creator an exclusive right over the use of his/her creation for a certain period of time. There are four types of intellectual property: patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets. For DEAC's purposes, institutions should have a policy on intellectual property rights as it relates to the creation of its courses/programs (including lectures, audio and visual materials, and pictorial or graphic works), websites, and software and databases. The institution's published policy should resolve any questions about who owns the copyright(s). The policy should be inclusive of faculty, staff, and students.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

An ongoing, cyclical process by which the institution assesses its administrative operations, support services, educational offerings, and facilities by gathering, analyzing, and using data on these areas to determine how well it is accomplishing its mission, goals, and outcomes against defined benchmarks. This planning process is used to inform decisions and continuous improvements efforts based on assessment results. Institutional effectiveness is a comprehensive roadmap used to measure continuous improvement at the institutional level. Outcomes assessment contributes to this process by measuring course/program-level effectiveness through students' achievement of learning outcomes. Data and results gathered from the institutional effectiveness planning process are used to inform strategic planning that is monitored annually and reviewed and revised during regular intervals.

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

A collection of institutional metrics and data useful for analysis, planning, improvement, and accreditation review.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Resources that make up the curriculum, such as textbooks, computer applications, links, kits, supplies used throughout an academic or vocational course or program.

INTERNATIONAL CONTRACT

A formal agreement between a U.S. entity and a non-U.S. entity. For DEAC purposes, whenever any major function of an institution (training sites, recruiting, instruction, marketing, administrative functions) is performed outside the United States, or when campuses or coordinating offices are opened in another country, an institution must have a formal contract with the non-U.S. entity. Also, when the institution contracts with foreign agents or educational entities, including formal articulation agreements, the DEAC institution must submit to the Commission in writing a complete description of the international program and activities and must submit its contracts for review.

INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF UNIVERSITIES

A handbook published by the International Association of Universities, which lists institutions that are accepted as foreign equivalents to U.S. institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

(The International Handbook of Universities. 29th ed. IAU ISBN: 978-92-9002-207-7. Cham Switzerland: International Association of Universities; November 2019. Palgrave Macmillan <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-3-319-76971-4> (eBook))

JOB PLACEMENT

An alumni service offered by an institution in which assistance is provided to graduates in finding opportunities for a new career position. Placement is further defined to describe when a graduate obtains employment as a direct result of the training, skills, or education the graduate received from the institution. The employment must be for a reasonable period of time, based on published program outcomes, and be considered sustainable (e.g., not a single day of employment). The employment must be directly related to the program from which the individual graduated, align with a majority of the educational and training outcomes of the program completed, and be a paid position.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

A platform or software application for the administration and management of online distance education courses, activities, and resources.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

An accessible collection of texts, literary materials, reference books, manuscripts, periodicals, videos, and audio materials that are maintained or provided by an institution. The “library” can include both print and non-print materials and generally make use of a variety of dispersed electronic digital databases. The accredited degree-awarding

institution is expected to have—or to provide learners ready access to—a reasonably rich array of supplemental information resources that are related to and enhance the content of the subject matter offered to students.

MAIN FACILITY

A geographic location that houses the headquarters of an institution. The institution provides evidence it is approved in the state for the activity that it conducts at the location.

MISSION

An institution's formally adopted statement of its fundamental reasons for existence, its shared purposes and values, and the students that it aims to serve. The mission is central to decisions about priorities and strategic initiatives and provides a context for DEAC decisions about quality and accreditation.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

A bilateral or multilateral agreement between two or more parties. It expresses a convergence of wills between the parties, indicating an intended common line of action. It is often used in cases where parties either do not imply a legal commitment or in situations where the parties cannot create a legally enforceable agreement. In private U.S. law, MOU is a common synonym for a letter of intent.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A process for determining and addressing needs or “gaps” between current conditions and desired conditions, often used for improvement in individuals, education/training, organizations, or communities (e.g. expected career or learning outcomes). An institution should complete a “needs assessment” before developing a new program. The curriculum development team should research and compare similar in-residence and distance education programs. The needs assessment should assess industry trends, knowledge, and competencies required for the field of study, professional organizations related to the field, obstacles to success in the field, the demand and pay for the field, adaptability of the topic to distance education, and availability of job opportunities, if applicable.

OBJECTIVES

Inputs that describe what the institution teaches students as a result of the curriculum offered. They describe the intended results of instruction planned by the institution. Data collected as a result of objectives communicates to all stakeholders the level of curriculum rigor being taught and assessed.

ON-SITE EVALUATORS

Individuals who are trained by DEAC to serve on an on-site team or as a reader/reviewer of Self-Evaluation Reports, exhibits, or other documents requested by DEAC. On-site evaluators may represent the public or serve at a DEAC-accredited institutions as presidents, provosts, deans, directors, or faculty but may also be subject matter experts in education.

OPE ID

Identification number used by the United States Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education to identify institutions that have Program Participation Agreements so that their students are eligible to participate in Federal Student Assistance programs under Title IV regulations. This is a six-digit number followed by a two-digit suffix used to identify branches, additional locations, and other entities that are part of the eligible institution.

OUTCOME

Outputs demonstrated by students as a result of the curriculum offered. They reflect the actual achieved results of what was learned and provide evidence that intended learning was achieved. Data collected as a result of outcomes communicate to all stakeholders the level of student learning achieved.

PRIOR LEARNING

Learning that has occurred outside the classroom. In some cases, credit may be awarded for prior learning through various means of assessment. An institution offering credit for prior learning assessment publishes and follows evaluation standards consistent with CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning. Prior learning assessment is performed by qualified individuals with experience in prior learning evaluation.

PROCTOR

A person who administers or supervises the testing process. The proctor verifies that the person taking the examination is who he/she says he/she is by reviewing appropriate documentation (i.e., driver's license or government-issued identification with photo).

PROFESSIONAL DOCTORAL DEGREE

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 doctoral degrees (such as the Doctor of Philosophy).

PROGRAM GOAL

A short, concise, general statement of the overall purpose of a program. A program goal should point towards some long-term effect, change, or purpose. It is usually not phrased in quantified terms. It should be sufficiently "definite" that it points clearly to the program.

READING LEVEL

The level of a person's reading comprehension as assessed by a standardized test or that equivalent level at which a program of study is written.

RECRUITING PERSONNEL

Any administrators, staff, faculty, or contractors who enroll prospective students.

REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION

Instruction designed and delivered to assist students in order to achieve expected competencies in core academic skills such as literacy and numeracy.

RESEARCH

Collection, analysis, and publication of data, studies, or other findings in order to expand a field of knowledge or its application.

RUBRIC

A tool for scoring student work or performances, typically in the form of a table or matrix, with criteria that describe the dimensions of the outcome and levels of performance. The work or performance may be given an overall score (holistic scoring), or criteria may be scored individually (analytic scoring). Rubrics are also used to communicate expectations to students.

SELF-EVALUATION

The process of self-evaluation provides a institution an opportunity to critically reflect on its operations, processes, and procedures at regular intervals and provides the on-site team with a comprehensive review of the institution, its mission, and its processes that are integral to delivering quality distance education.

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

The Self-Evaluation Report is a guide that institutions use to communicate how their policies and procedures meet or exceed DEAC accreditation standards.

SHOW CAUSE DIRECTIVE

The Commission may direct the institution to Show Cause as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn when substantive questions and concerns are raised regarding a DEAC-accredited institution's compliance with DEAC's accreditation standards or procedures. The issuance of a Show Cause directive is not an adverse action but a statement of serious concern by the Commission. The burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate that it is meeting DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures. Notice of the Show Cause directive is provided to federal and state agencies with jurisdiction over the institution and to the public.

SOUND PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Theory and research-based fundamentals designed to promote effective learning strategies.

SPECIAL VISIT

A focused visit that may be requested by the Commission to follow up on a specific area of concern.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The integrated planning that links the mission, priorities, people, and institutional operations in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making, and action. Strategic planning shapes and guides the entire institution as it evolves over time and within its educational community. Strategic planning is critical to institutions' success, and even

long-term survival, within higher education. As the competition in distance education continues to increase, it is important that institutions participate in a dynamic and continuous strategic planning process. The strategic planning process provides institutions with the structure needed to achieve their mission while identifying and committing the resources necessary to achieve strategic initiatives. The process allows institutions to objectively evaluate and plan for challenges and threats while maximizing opportunities and enhancing strengths.

STUDENT INTEGRITY

Involves the enforcement of specific, published rules concerning academic honesty (student cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty in any form) and personal conduct that is above reproach. Student integrity is best promoted by the implementation of a published honor code or honor system, which is a set of rules or principles governing an academic community based on a set of ideals that constitute honorable behavior within that community. The use of an honor code depends on the idea that people (at least within the community) can be trusted to act honorably. Those who are in violation of the honor code can be subject to various sanctions, including academic dismissal and expulsion from the institution. Student honor codes require all students to agree to them, and they often require students to report any violations of the code of which they have personal knowledge. A DEAC institution promotes an academic environment suitable for distance or online delivery where students are encouraged to act with professional, academic, and personal integrity. The institution must hold students personally accountable for upholding the institution's stated expectations for conduct.

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Evidence that documents students are satisfied with the instructional and educational services provided.

STUDENT SERVICES

Resources provided for students by an institution. These services are designed to proactively support students to perform to their potential, motivate students to study, or respond to students' questions of a nonacademic nature.

SUBJECT SPECIALIST

A person whose background, education, training, experience, occupation, and/or profession qualifies him/her as a reliable authority or expert in a specific field of study and who is appointed by DEAC to evaluate distance education courses/programs in terms of the published standards for accredited institutions.

SYNCHRONOUS

Instructional communication or interaction that exists or occurs at the same time.

TEACH-OUT PLAN

Institutions develop a formal plan, approved by the Commission, that enables currently enrolled students to complete their educational offerings at either the same or another institution. During a "teach-out," students are entitled to receive all instruction, services,

and materials consistent with the signed enrollment agreement or other similar contractual document.

TERMINAL DEGREE

The highest academic or professional degree awarded in a specific field of study. Generally, doctoral degrees and master's degrees in specialized fields are considered terminal degrees.

TOTAL COURSE PRICE

Includes tuition, fees, educational services and instruction, any other services (such as proctored examinations or placement); any required books, kits, and equipment; any optional or required resident training; and charges applied to all students, such as application fees, registration fees, and finance charges. Institutions will use Total Course Price in preparing enrollment agreements, calculating refund amounts, and collecting student accounts.

TRANSCRIPT

An official copy of a student's educational record at an educational institution. It usually lists all courses taken, final grades received, credits (and honors) earned, and degrees or certificates awarded, including corresponding dates of enrollment and completion.