



FROM THE DEAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

October 16, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

Over the past year DEAC has engaged in an extensive process to reorganize, and in some instances revise, the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*. This process involved numerous committee meetings and conference calls, countless discussions, and two public comment periods. The Commission convened on October 5, 2015 to review the comments it received between August 20, 2015 and September 21, 2015. The comments provided additional valuable insights. In consideration of these comments, the Commission made additional changes and then voted to formally adopt **Part I – Introduction Section, Part II – Processes and Procedures, and Part III – Accreditation Standards** for inclusion in the January 2016 edition of the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*. I am pleased to provide you with an advance copy of these three sections so that you may begin to review and prepare for implementation in 2016. The Commission thought it was very important to make these documents available in time to present and discuss the final adopted changes at the October 18-20, 2015 Accreditation Workshop in Palm Springs, CA.

Part I – Introduction Section, Part II – Processes and Procedures, and Part III – Accreditation Standards will replace the sections in the 2015 *DEAC Accreditation Handbook* that are currently defined as *Preface, Introduction, Accreditation, The Accrediting Commission, the Process of Accreditation, A. Standards, C. Policies, and D. Procedures*.

Please scroll to the next page to view, download or print a copy of **Part I – Introduction Section, Part II – Processes and Procedures, and Part III – Accreditation Standards**.

Between now and December 31, 2015, the DEAC staff and I will work closely with the Standards Committee to revise the companion documents to the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*. These documents include the Guide to the SER, Applications for Accreditation, Applications for Substantive Changes, Preparing for Accreditation Tutorial, Evaluator Checklists and the Fee Structure and will principally appear in Part IV – Appendix.

The requirements set forth in **Part I – Introduction Section, Part II – Processes and Procedures, and Part III – Accreditation Standards** and the January 2016 *DEAC Accreditation Handbook* will be effective beginning on **January 1, 2016**. The DEAC will require full compliance with these requirements by **June 30, 2016**.

Please note that the 2015 *DEAC Accreditation Handbook* remains in effect until December 31, 2015. If your institution is currently preparing a Self-Evaluation for a spring or fall 2016 on-site evaluation or if you are planning for a substantive change in early 2016, please be in touch with Nan Ridgeway, Director of Accreditation, to discuss the implementation timeframe in more detail.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our community of educators for their support and active contributions to the process. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Leah K. Matthews
Executive Director

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

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 Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) was founded in 1926 as an association under the name "National Home Study Council" to promote education quality and ethical business practices for correspondence education programs. In 1955, the Accrediting Commission was established. It created and implemented accreditation standards and procedures to examine and approve distance learning institutions. In 1959, the Accrediting Commission 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 name of the organization changed from the National Home Study Council to the Distance Education and Training Council, and in 2015, was changed to the Distance Education Accrediting Commission. The DEAC 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 is 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.

PURPOSE OF THE ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

DEAC has prepared this Accreditation Handbook as a compilation of its processes, procedures, and standards. It is intended to assist institutions in understanding and preparing for evaluation by DEAC. Institutions should use it as they organize and conduct their self-evaluations, as they evaluate their readiness to meet the rigors inherent in voluntary accreditation, and as they work to maintain the standards of DEAC. Finally, this Accreditation Handbook 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. Evaluator's Rating Forms, Guide to Self-Evaluation, Applications, and Report Forms are found on DEAC's website at www.deac.org. Please note: Institutions should always check the website for the most up-to-date versions of these documents.

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 also 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) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously (see CFR 34, § 602.3). The technologies may 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 communication devices;
- 3) Audio-conferencing; or
- 4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).”

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 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?

Distance education is not a new idea or concept but has been around since the early 18th century in Europe and early 19th century in the United States, predominantly through print-based correspondence programs. These pioneering students who took advantage of distance education were mostly individuals living in rural or remote areas who did not have access to residential educational institutions. Another growing population of students came from members of the military. A number of correspondence education institutions saw a significant increase after World War II as returning service members continued to pursue their educational goals.

With the increasing focus on distance education, it was important that the public have confidence in the quality of education provided by institutions. Given the unique nature of distance education delivery, accreditation expectations for residential education programs were not always appropriate to effectively evaluate education quality for distance education; therefore, accrediting organizations, such as the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, were formed to offer an accreditation oversight process specifically to meet the unique quality assurance needs of distance education institutions.

Today, institutions offering distance education curricula use a variety of innovative technologies. Despite the various advantages provided by distance education, students and the public need assurances that the credential earned has value and that students have access to all related services necessary to support their success. DEAC accreditation 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 encompass a broad variety of educational offerings through distance education. DEAC institutions may be organized as for-profit degree-granting or non-degree-granting, nonprofit degree- and non-degree-granting, faith-based institutions, and as training and educational providers that offer students more choices to meet their educational goals. Students can choose the institutions that best meet their needs while being provided assurances that the chosen program, when appropriately accredited, is commensurate in quality to other traditional programs offered in their home state or country.

DEAC accreditation provides quality assurance to students (prospective, current, and graduates), institutions, the public, government, and industry professionals.

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, have been evaluated and meet 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 assure 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 2012, NACIQI recommended to the Secretary of Education that DEAC receive recognition through 2017. 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 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. 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

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) awards accreditation to institutions that offer quality distance education programs and meet published accreditation standards. The burden of proof in demonstrating compliance with accreditation standards rests with the institution.

I. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The institution assumes the burden of proof in demonstrating that its curricula are within DEAC's recognized scope of authority. DEAC reserves the right to limit its reviews to the kinds of institutions and types of programs that are within its recognized scope and decline to consider institutions and programs for accreditation that are outside DEAC's scope or competence or where there is a lack of adequate standards to permit a meaningful evaluation.

Before DEAC officially accepts an institution's initial Application for Accreditation, the institution demonstrates that it meets the following eligibility criteria:

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 which:

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); and
6. The institution offers non-degree and/or degree programs up to the professional doctoral level pursuant to DEAC's scope of recognition.

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 are supported by state-issued documentation or in statutory language for that state. Should an accredited institution lose its state licensure in its state of domicile for whatever reason, DEAC accreditation terminates as of the date of the loss of state licensure, subject to DEAC's appeal procedures.

- C. At the time of the initial application, the institution has been enrolling students in the current programs for two consecutive years and under the present ownership (no new programs may be added during the two-year period).
- D. 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.
- E. The institution's permanent physical business office is at a fixed geographic location that is appropriately licensed or authorized as required by local and state regulatory authorities. A P.O. Box is not a physical business office address.
- F. The institution documents, through audited or reviewed comparative financial statements that cover its two most recent fiscal years, that it is financially sound and can meet its financial obligations to provide instruction and service to its students. All financial statements submitted to DEAC are prepared in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). 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.
- G. 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.
- H. The institution, the institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations and show a record of integrity and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators have records free from any association with any misfeasance, including, but not limited to, owning, managing or controlling any educational institutions that have entered bankruptcy or have closed, to the detriment of the students.
- I. 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 the credit history, prior bankruptcy, criminal background, debarment from federal student aid programs, the closing of educational institutions in which they were owners, managers or principals, or the loss of accreditation or state approval to operate an educational institution. The costs of such background checks will be borne by the Applicant.

- J. The institution is free from any pending or final action brought by a state agency or recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to operate or to deny accreditation or renewal of accreditation.

II. APPLICATION, SELF-EVALUATION, AND READINESS ASSESSMENT

Accreditation is a voluntary process. Institutions desiring accredited status are expected to take the initiative to complete the steps below. Institutions seeking accreditation or renewal of accreditation assume the burden of proof in presenting themselves as meeting all DEAC Accreditation Standards.

The steps in the DEAC accreditation process are:

A. PREPARING FOR DEAC ACCREDITATION

A key person enrolls in and successfully completes the *Preparing for DEAC Accreditation* tutorial to qualify as a Compliance Officer. The course is available on DEAC's website at www.deac.org. This tutorial is completed within one year prior to submitting the Application for Accreditation and before writing the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). DEAC does not accept Applications for Accreditation without a copy of the Certificate of Completion from the key person who completed the course.

B. APPLICATION

To initiate the accreditation process, the Application for Accreditation, application fee (see Accreditation Fees page), and students' names are submitted to DEAC. Acceptance of the Application for Accreditation begins the formal process. Institutions must complete all steps in the accreditation process within 12 to 18 months after the Application for Accreditation is accepted.

An applicant institution may not refer to its accreditation status in any manner. In doing so, it could potentially mislead the public about the institution's affiliation with DEAC. 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."

Students' Name Submission: The institution includes 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 of the institution beginning the first day of the 18th month preceding the date of this application. As far as possible, the number of the students reflects the same proportion of the enrollments for each of the institution's major course/program offerings. If the institution has less than 100 students, 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.

C. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

The Compliance Officer and staff begin writing the institution's Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is prepared in accordance with the provisions of the "Guide

to Self-Evaluation.” The SER provides data on all areas of an institution’s operation, history, course offerings, student services, finances, etc. The SER includes a wide gathering and analysis of pertinent data on all aspects of the institution and its work. Institutions seeking renewal of accreditation submit their Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits to the on-site team six weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit.

D. READINESS ASSESSMENT (INITIAL APPLICANTS ONLY)

DEAC requires all initial applicants to undergo a Readiness Assessment conducted by an independent DEAC-appointed evaluator. The Readiness Assessment allows DEAC to ascertain if the applicant’s Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits provide sufficient evidence and information for a successful on-site visit. The Readiness Assessment provides the applicant with guidance on the actions necessary for the institution to prepare for a full accreditation review. The Readiness Assessment assures that the applicant meets a minimum level of eligibility qualification for DEAC accreditation that would justify the commitment of DEAC resources in administering a full accreditation review. An initial applicant submits its Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and Exhibits, accompanied by the Readiness Assessment fee (see Fees page), within 60 days of the date DEAC accepts the Application for Accreditation. The institution submits the materials in accordance with DEAC’s instructions for electronic submission.

The Readiness Assessment Report is returned to the institution within 10-12 weeks. The institution is either “Deemed Ready” or “Deemed Not Ready.”

- **Deemed Ready:** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating they are deemed ready to continue with the accreditation process. To begin the curricular review process, the institution submits Application Part 1 to the Manager of Institutional Development and Assessment. The institution submits its curricula for review within three months after submitting Application Part 1 for Degree Program, Non-Degree, or High School Program Review. The institution revises its Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits and submits it to the on-site team six weeks prior to the on-site visit.
- **Deemed Not Ready (2nd Submission):** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating it is not deemed ready to continue with the accreditation process. The institution has six months to revise its Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits incorporating the evaluator’s comments and recommendations.
- **Deemed Not Ready (3rd Submission):** If the institution is not deemed ready after the second submission, the institution has another six months to revise its Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits. Upon its third submission, a Readiness Assessment on-site visit is scheduled. If deemed not ready following the on-site visit, the institution can reapply after at least one year.

III. CURRICULAR REVIEW

As a part of the accreditation process, the Commission engages subject specialists to conduct comprehensive evaluations of course/program materials. A curricular review takes up to six

months. This includes the subject specialist search and the initial review by the subject specialist. Course materials submitted as part of an institution's application for accreditation are not returned to the institution. The institution is invoiced per subject specialist for each course/program review. The subject 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 comprehensive on-site review includes the scope and sequence of the all curricula.

A. CURRICULAR REVIEW FOR INSTITUTIONS SEEKING INITIAL ACCREDITATION

1. DEGREE PROGRAMS

- Once the institution is deemed “ready” to move ahead in the accreditation process, it submits a list of 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 courses required for submission and the fee.
- For each degree program offered, 50 percent of the courses are selected for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criteria:
 - Broad and fairly representative of the curriculum for the entire degree program;
 - Selected from each level (e.g., 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, and 700) of the degree program(s); and
 - Submitted using the following percentages based on degree program:
 - **Associate's Degree:** 25 percent general education and 25 percent core courses/electives, including the capstone/final program course.
 - **Bachelor's Degree:** 25 percent general education and 25 percent core courses/electives, including the capstone/final program course, or 50 percent of core courses if offering a degree completion program.
 - **Master's Degree:** 25 percent core courses and 25 percent elective/concentration courses, including the capstone/final program course.
 - **Doctoral Degree:** 25 percent core courses and 25 percent research methodology courses, including the capstone project/dissertation course.
- The institution submits 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 the curriculum materials, including supporting documentation, for review off-site by subject specialists.

3. HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- 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.

For each high school program offered, 50 percent of the courses are selected for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criteria:

- Broadly and fairly representative of the following subject areas: mathematics, English, science, social studies, and electives.
- The institution submits the curriculum materials, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

B. 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, the institution will submit all of the curricula and DEAC will select 25 percent of the core courses from each level (e.g., 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, and 700) of the degree program(s). 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 25 percent of the core courses from each level (e.g., 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, and 700) of the degree program(s). The selection will include the capstone/final program course. For bachelor degree programs, DEAC will select three representative courses from the programs submitted for review. If deemed necessary, the Commission will request additional courses for review.
 - If over eleven programs are offered, then the institution will submit 7 programs or 25 percent of the programs (whichever is greater) and DEAC will select 25 percent of the core courses from each level (e.g., 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, and 700) of the degree program(s). The selection will include the capstone/final program course. For bachelor degree programs, DEAC will select three representative courses from the programs submitted for review. If deemed necessary, the Commission will request additional courses for review.
- c. The institution submits the curriculum materials, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by 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 criteria:
- 25 percent of all educational offerings that are broadly representative.
- c. The institution submits 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 High School Program Application Part 1 listing 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, 25 percent of the courses are selected for review. The representative courses are selected based on

the following criteria:

- Broadly and fairly representative of the following subject areas: mathematics, English, science, social studies, and electives.
- c. The institution submits 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 prior to the on-site evaluation. The response is sent to DEAC and the DEAC on-site evaluation team at least two weeks prior to the on-site evaluation.

IV. 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. The Commission may establish procedures for providing notice of the institutions to be reviewed for other reasons.
- B. Whenever information from third parties is included in the record, the institution under review will have an opportunity to respond before any accreditation decision becomes final.
- C. In considering the appropriate action, DEAC 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.
- D. 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.
- E. 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.

F. **Action Notwithstanding Third Party Action:** If DEAC grants initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation to an institution notwithstanding the threatened interim or final adverse 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, consistent with accreditation standards, regarding why the previous action by the accrediting agency or state does not preclude DEAC's action.

V. ON-SITE EVALUATION

DEAC's accreditation process is grounded on the fundamental principle of peer review that enables faculty and administrative staff from within higher education to make recommendations essential in assuring the quality of learning among institutions on behalf of all students. The process is guided by transparent standards that are established collaboratively by professional peers and member institutions.

A. **On-site Team Selection:** 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. 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.

B. **Function of the On-site Team:** 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, and it is vital that these individuals be present or available during the evaluation. The evaluators verify that the institution is meeting its mission and can demonstrate successful student achievement.

The on-site evaluators' reports document whether the institution is meeting or exceeding all DEAC Accreditation Standards. The Chair's Report is provided to the institution for response, and both the Chair's Report and the institution's response are submitted to the Commission for review.

C. **On-site Evaluators:** In selecting evaluators for on-site evaluations, the Director of Accreditation considers the nature of the institution being reviewed for compliance with DEAC Accreditation Standards, the methods of operation unique to the institution, the nature of the program(s) offered, and the expertise and past evaluation experience of the evaluator.

- The number of on-site evaluators is determined by the size of the institution, but the teams generally includes:
 - a Chair;
 - an education evaluator;
 - a business evaluator;
 - a subject specialist for each subject area;
 - a DEAC staff member; and
 - state or federal agency observers (invited).

- Before the on-site evaluation, each evaluator develops a comprehensive picture of the institution's operations by completing a thorough review of the Self-Evaluation Report and Exhibits and answers questions on the appropriate rating form.
- The Chair of the on-site team is responsible for the completion of the on-site evaluation in accordance with the Commission's processes and procedures and assures that each evaluator completes his/her tasks during the on-site evaluation.
- A DEAC staff member accompanies the on-site team throughout the on-site evaluation to assure objectivity, impartiality, uniformity, interpretation of standards, and adherence to established procedures and to serve as a liaison between the on-site team and the Commission.

VI. THE CHAIR'S REPORT, RESPONSE, AND THE COMMISSION'S DECISION

Following the on-site evaluation, the Chair prepares a Chair's Report and submits it to the Director of Accreditation. The Director of Accreditation sends the Chair's Report to the institution prior to submitting it to the Commission. The Chair's Report describes the findings of the on-site team and provides comments on the institution's demonstrated compliance with, or failure to demonstrate compliance with, the DEAC accreditation standards.

- A. The institution has 30 days from the receipt of the Chair's Report to respond. In its response, the institution may add new or supporting information or correct any incorrect statements made in the Chair's Report. Regardless of its accredited status, all applicant institutions are obligated to keep the Commission informed of any changes in management, enrollments, etc., which occur subsequent to the date of the on-site evaluation.
- B. The Commission takes action in accordance with Section VII below. Within 30 days, the Executive Director notifies the President/CEO of the institution of the Commission's decision through an Action Letter. The Action Letter includes a detailed written statement that identifies any deficiencies in the institution's compliance with DEAC's standards or conditions for initial or renewal of accreditation. The notification also advises the institution of its right to appeal an adverse decision of the Commission.
- C. When the Commission withdraws the accreditation of an institution, the Commission does not make the action public until the period for requesting an appeal has expired or the appeal itself is denied.

VII. COMMISSION ACTIONS ON INITIAL AND RENEWAL OF ACCREDITATION

The DEAC usually meets twice a year, in January and June. At its meetings, the DEAC reviews information and documentation on the applications for initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation. The Commission reviews the Application for Accreditation, Self-

Evaluation Report, the Chair’s Report, the institution’s response to the Chair’s Report, subject specialists’ reports, student surveys, any complaints from the public, information gathered from other interested parties, any responses to public notices, the institution’s advertisements and catalog, any communications between the institution and the Commission, and other relevant documentation.

The Commission takes one of four courses of action:

- A. **Accredit** a new applicant institution for up to three years, or continue an institution’s accredited status for up to five years. Reports of institutional enhancements of programs and services may be required.
- B. **Defer** a decision pending receipt of a Progress Report, submission of additional information, and/or the results of a follow-up on-site evaluation. The maximum deferral period is 12 months (unless the Commission extends the period for “good cause” as defined below).
 1. **Good Cause:** The maximum time period for achieving compliance with DEAC accreditation standards is 12 months. The Commission may extend this 12-month period for good cause shown. “Good cause” in this context is defined as a sufficient reason for the Commission to allow additional time for the institution to show that it has made substantial progress; for example, it needs additional time to more fully document experience in attaining full compliance, additional resources are shortly to become available, or there are exigent circumstances, such as illness or accident, that justify an extension of time. When the Commission grants a “good cause” extension, the time allowed for institutional compliance may exceed the permissible compliance times published in Federal Regulations. The Commission notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education if an extension is granted for “good cause.”
 - a. The Commission considers the following criteria when granting an extension for a good cause:
 - The length of time requested for the extension;
 - Rationale for granting or denying the extension;
 - Common sense matters such as near-term future availability of reports or data;
 - Anticipated impact of an extension on students enrolled with the institution; and
 - Limitations on a further extension to an existing extension, limits on the frequency and use of “good cause.”
 - b. The Commission may also elect to monitor the progress of an institution that has received an extension for a good cause by requesting documentation periodically on the institution’s progress toward compliance with the Commission’s standards or procedures.

- c. After reviewing the above considerations, the Commission will decide to grant or deny an institution's request for an extension for good cause. This Commission decision is not appealable.
 2. At its discretion, the Commission may restrict substantive changes in conjunction with deferring action on an application for renewal of accreditation.
- C. Direct the institution to **Show Cause** as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn
 1. **Show Cause Directive:** In cases where the Commission has reason to believe that an institution is not in compliance with accreditation standards and other requirements, the Commission may direct the institution to Show Cause as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. An institution that receives a Show Cause Directive will be required to demonstrate corrective action and compliance with accrediting standards or procedures. Because the issuance of a show cause directive is not an adverse action, this is not an appealable decision. However, the burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate that it is meeting DEAC's accreditation standards.
 2. **Notices:** When a Show Cause Directive is issued, a written notice will be sent to the institution within 30 days of the Commission's decision that:
 - States the reasons why the Show Cause Directive was issued;
 - Identifies the standard and other accreditation requirements with which the institution is believed to be noncompliant;
 - Explains the reasons and recites the evidence indicating that the institution may not be in compliance with accreditation requirements; and
 - Advises the institution of its obligations under the Show Cause Directive and of the deadline for its response.
 3. Notice of the Show Cause Directive is provided to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state agencies or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting organizations at the same time it notifies the institution of the Show Cause Directive. The Commission posts a notice on its website within 24 hours of notifying the institution.
 4. **Decision on Show Cause Directive:** Upon expiration of the time limits of submission of the Response to the Show Cause Directive or any progress report or additional requirements placed on the institution in relation to the 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, if it is determined that the response

gives evidence that such removal is warranted or if the response shows compliance with the cited accreditation standards and requirements;

- Continue the Show Cause Directive, pending the receipt of additional information or further reports from the institution;
- Order a special visit in accordance with 7(c)(v) below; or
- Withdraw accreditation, an action that would be subject to an appeal by the institution.

5. A special visit is ordered by the Commission because of unusual circumstances or failure by the institution to meet its obligations to the Commission. The Commission's requirement for a special visit may be triggered because of:

- 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 comply with a condition of accreditation;
- Reported negative financial conditions or events;
- A show cause order issued by the Commission;
- Governmental complaints against the institution; or
- Similar serious concerns.

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 for executing the special visit as directed, it will be reported to the Commission for action, including withdrawing accreditation.

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

6. The Commission will notify the institution of its decision concerning its Response to the Show Cause Directive within 30 days. In all cases, the Commission will allow the institution sufficient time to respond to any findings before making any final decision regarding the institution's accredited status.

7. The Commission will not consider substantive changes or approve any new courses or programs when an institution is under a Show Cause Directive.

D. Deny accreditation to an applicant or withdraw accreditation from an accredited institution (these actions are appealable – see *Appealing the Commission's Decision*).

1. Prior to any final adverse action by the Commission that is based solely upon a failure to meet DEAC Standard X: Financial Responsibility, the institution

has the right, for a single occasion, to provide the Commission significant financial information that was not available to the institution prior to the determination of the adverse action, as long as the information bears materially on any financial deficiencies cited by the Commission. The Commission shall determine if the financial information submitted by the institution is significant and material, and if it is found to be so, the Commission will consider the new information prior to taking any final action.

2. Any determination made with respect to the significance or materiality of the new financial information submitted as set forth above will not be subject to a separate appeal by the institution.

VIII. APPEALING THE COMMISSION'S ADVERSE DECISION

A. **Request for Appeal**

1. The institution may appeal a Commission decision to deny or withdraw accreditation. The request for appeal must be made using the Application for Appeal. The application must be sent with the required fees (see Fees page) to the Executive Director of the Commission within 10 days of the receipt of the Commission's letter advising the institution of the decision to deny or withdraw accreditation. The institution's failure to submit the application and fees within 10 days will be deemed a waiver of its right to appeal and cause the Commission's action to become final.
2. The institution shall file a written statement of the grounds for its request for appeal within thirty (30) days of receiving the notification of the Commission's action. The institution's decision to appeal is limited to appealing the factual record that was before the Commission and to the decision that the Commission made in executing its standards and procedures.
3. If the institution's appeal request is not successful, where the decision to deny or withdraw accreditation is upheld and becomes final, the institution is not eligible to re-apply for accreditation for a period of one year from the date of the final action.

B. **Appeals Panel**

1. In the appeals process, the 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 does not have authority concerning the reasonableness of eligibility criteria, procedures, or accreditation standards. It can affirm, amend, remand, or reverse the prior decision of the Commission as set forth below. Its role is to determine whether the Commission's action was not supported by the record or was clearly erroneous. The institution has the burden of proof in demonstrating that the action of the Commission was not supported by the record or was otherwise erroneous.

2. The Appeals Panel consists of three people appointed by the Commission: a public member, an academic, and an administrator. Potential members of an Appeals Panel will be selected from the ranks of former members of the Commission, the corps of Commission evaluators, and active staff of DEAC accredited institutions who have completed DEAC's evaluator training program. All panelists will be given a training session on appeals procedures and will be subject to the provisions in the DEAC Conflict of Interest Policy.
3. The Appeals Panel members possess knowledge of accreditation purposes, standards, and procedures and will be constituted to meet the panel composition requirements set forth above. The candidates cannot include any current member of the Commission and cannot have a conflict of interest. The Executive Director submits a list of proposed Appeal Panel members to the institution in advance. Within 10 calendar days of receiving the list of proposed panel members, an institution may ask, 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 the Commission determines that a conflict exists, the panelist will be replaced. No panel member may serve if he/she participated, in any respect, in the underlying decision by the Commission to deny or withdraw accreditation.

C. Consideration and Decision of the Appeal

1. 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 does not have authority regarding the reasonableness of the accreditation standards and procedures. Its role is to determine whether the Commission's action was not supported by the record or was clearly erroneous.
2. The institution sets the specific grounds for its appeal in writing within the time specified above and states 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 standards 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.
3. The Appeals Panel considers the grounds for the appeal, the institution's oral presentation, and the record that was before the Commission when it made the decision to deny accreditation or withdraw accreditation.

D. Decisions Available to the Appeals Panel

1. **Affirm:** If the Appeals Panel determines 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 clearly erroneous, it must affirm the decision of the

Commission. In certain instances, the Commission's decision may be based on multiple violations of DEAC standards or procedures. If the institution shows that there is no support in the record for some of the violations that is not by itself sufficient to meet the institution's burden of proof. The institution must show that, in light of the entire record, the decision is not supported by the record or is clearly erroneous.

2. **Remand:** The Appeals Panel may remand a decision to the Commission when it finds that the Commission failed to consider a material fact before it in reaching its decision. A remand is a directive to the Commission that it must reconsider its action in light of all relevant facts that were before the Commission at the time of its decision, including the specific material fact or facts that are the basis for the remand. The Appeals Panel must identify those material facts that it finds the Commission failed to consider.
3. **Amend:** If the Appeals Panel determines that, although there is evidence to support the Commission's decision, it is nevertheless clearly in error, the Appeals Panel may amend the decision. A decision to amend an adverse action sets forth the specific grounds for the decision and directs the Commission to modify its decision in accordance with the specific direction of the Appeals Panel. The Appeals Panel may, in its discretion, amend a decision to deny accreditation by directing the Commission to grant accreditation and direct the Commission to consider the proper length of the grant, consistent with the direction of the panel or with the practices of the Commission or in accordance with other guidance from the Appeals Panel.
4. **Reverse:** The Appeals Panel may reverse a decision of the Commission if it finds that the Commission's decision, in light of the entire record, was not supported by the record or was clearly erroneous. A decision to reverse an action of the Commission will state the specific bases for the decision to reverse. A decision to reverse a withdrawal of accreditation will direct the Commission to set aside its decision to withdraw and to reinstate the accreditation of the institution as it was before the withdrawal decision. A decision to reverse an action to deny accreditation directs the Commission to award a specific grant of accreditation for a term determined by the Appeals Panel.

E. Hearing Procedure

1. The Commission shall have at least one representative present at the hearing. The Commission representative and representatives of the institution will have the opportunity to make opening and closing statements to the Appeals Panel. Such oral statement may not exceed 20 minutes in length. The institution must provide information relevant to the specific grounds for the appeal. If the institution intends to make an oral presentation, the President/CEO of the institution should make the request in writing to the Executive Director not less than 30 days prior to the date of the hearing. The names and affiliations of those appearing to make the oral presentation must be included with the

request. The institution is entitled to be represented by counsel during the appeal hearing. The DEAC does not consider the appeal hearing to be adversarial in nature. Accordingly, the institution will not have the right to examine the Commission representative.

2. The appeal hearing may be recorded by stenographic or electronic means if requested by the institution. Recording and transcripts thereof shall be at the institution's expense, and a copy will be provided to the institution in a timely manner following the appeal hearing.

F. Commission Receipt and Implementation of Appeals Panel Decisions

The written decision of the Appeals Panel is provided to the Commission within 30 days. The Commission implements the decision of the Appeals Panel to affirm, amend, or reverse the prior Commission decision within 30 days of receipt of the written decision by the Appeals Panel. The Commission notifies the institution of the decision within 30 days of implementation.

G. Notification

The Commission notifies federal and state agencies, accrediting organizations, and the public of its decision according to *Notification and Information Sharing* procedures described below.

IX. BINDING ARBITRATION

- A. Upon being notified that its appeal did not change an adverse Commission decision, an institution has five business days to request arbitration, during which no public notification of the Commission action will be made, and no new students may be enrolled. When the institution remits an arbitration fee (see Fees page) established by the Commission, the Commission will select an arbitrator from candidates recommended by the American Arbitration Association. Early resolution of such disputes being in the public good, the parties shall make every effort to expedite the arbitration.
- B. The analytic framework used for the arbitration is developed by the federal courts, particularly the circuit courts, and selected excerpts are cited in an appendix to this procedure. Courts have described their role not as making a de novo review but as determining whether the Commission's decision was arbitrary or capricious. In like manner, the arbitration should make this determination, assessing whether the association confined its action to the contours of due process and fundamental principles of fairness, while recognizing the special nature of accreditation and according deference to the rules and processes of accrediting associations.
- C. The arbitrator is provided with all of the information that was available to the Commission when it made the adverse decision and with the procedures used to reach the decision. Along with the presentation by the parties, this will allow for a thorough consideration of whether the Commission's decision was arbitrary or capricious or was reached in an unfair manner. Additional discovery activity and witnesses should not be required. In an exceptional circumstance, where the arbitrator finds that

additional information is essential to reaching a fair decision, limited discovery may be authorized.

- D. Both parties may appear before the arbitrator with legal counsel to present their position, and each may file a written brief, subject to the 15-page limit used by the U.S. Department of Education's appeals division, and up to five exhibits.
- E. The arbitrator's decision will be admissible in any subsequent proceeding where it is relevant.

X. NOTIFICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

The DEAC notifies federal and state agencies, accrediting organizations, and the public of its decisions. Pursuant to federal regulations regarding the recognition of other accrediting organizations, the Commission will observe this policy in keeping interested and appropriate groups informed of the accrediting actions taken by the Commission. Unless otherwise specified, the effective date of the Commission's decision is the date on the letter notifying the institution of the Commission's decision.

- A. **Initial and Renewal of Accreditation:** The DEAC provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, and the appropriate accrediting organizations at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes its decision to accredit or reaccredit an institution.
- B. **Deny or Withdraw Accreditation:** The Commission provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, and the appropriate accrediting organizations at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes a final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation. A final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation is one reached after an institution has exhausted the appeals process provided when appealing the Commission's adverse decision.
- C. **Show Cause Directive:** The Commission provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, and the appropriate accrediting organizations 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.
- D. The Commission provides written notice to the public of any of the decisions listed above within 24 hours of its notice to the institution.
- E. For any decisions to deny or withdraw accreditation, no later than 60 days after the final decision, the Commission 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 the Commission's decision. If no official comments by the institution are provided within

14 days of notification, the Commission will document that the affected institution was offered the opportunity to provide an official comment.

- F. **Resigning or Voluntarily Withdrawing Accreditation:** Within 30 days of receiving notification from an institution of its decision to resign or voluntarily withdraw from accreditation, the Commission posts a notice of the institution's resignation or voluntary withdraw 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 and, upon request, the public.
- G. **Accreditation Lapses:** If an institution elects not to renew its accreditation, the Commission posts notice within 30 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 and, upon request, the public.
- H. The Commission submits to the U.S. Secretary of Education the name of any institution it accredits which the Commission has reason to believe is engaging in fraud and abuse, along with the Commission's reasons for concern about the institution's activities. The Commission informs the U.S. Secretary of Education whenever it finds significant or systemic deficiencies in the institution's assignment of credit hours.
- I. **Scope of Public Information:** The Commission will make available to the public and may publish in official DEAC publications, including its website and/or *DEAC Directory of Accredited Institutions*, the following information:
- The name, address, telephone number, and website address of an accredited institution;
 - The month and year accredited and month and year accreditation expires;
 - A summary list of programs offered by the institution;
 - A summary of information pertaining to an adverse action;
 - A summary of information pertaining to an action subject to appeal; and
 - The date of an institution's voluntary withdrawal of accreditation.
- J. **Confidentiality of Records:** Information pertaining to the Commission's actions is confidential and is not shared with third parties, other DEAC institutions, the media, or the public, except as authorized by an institution or as required by government regulation, judicial or administrative process, and other legal requirements.
- K. **Sharing Information with Government Entities and Other Accrediting Organizations:** DEAC grants all reasonable special requests for accreditation information made by other accrediting organizations and government entities. Requests for information from such entities must be in writing and submitted to the Executive Director, and must state the name and address of the institution for which the information is sought, the nature of the information requested, and the purposes for which the information is to be used. A decision to deny such a request is not

subject to appeal.

- L. Institutions accredited by or seeking accreditation from DEAC provide a release as part of their Application for Accreditation for purposes of eliciting information from state licensing agencies and government entities, as well as an acknowledgement of the fact that accreditation information may, at the discretion of the Commission, be shared with other accrediting organizations and government entities.
- M. **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.
- N. DEAC provides the following information to the U.S. Department of Education:
- A copy of any annual report it prepares;
 - 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;
 - 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;
 - Any actions available to the Accrediting Commission;
 - 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;
 - The name of any institution that DEAC accredits that DEAC has reason to believe is failing to meet its FSA Title IV responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse, along with DEAC's reasons for concern about the institution; and
 - 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. The U.S. Secretary of Education may ask for this information to assist the Department in resolving problems with the institution's participation in the Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs.

DEAC reviews on a case-by-case basis its contact with or information or materials provided to the U.S. Department of Education and the circumstances surrounding them and will determine whether they should be considered confidential. 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.

O. **Public Disclosure of Accreditation Status:**

1. DEAC specifies how an accredited institution may refer to its accreditation status. An institution may refer to its accredited status as follows:
 - Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
 - DEAC Accredited
2. DEAC does not have a pre-accreditation or candidacy status. An applicant institution may not refer to its accreditation status in any manner. In doing so, it could potentially mislead the public about the institution's affiliation with DEAC. 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."
3. If DEAC is informed that an applicant institution is telling the public it is "pre-accredited" or "will be accredited," the Executive Director will notify the institution immediately and tell them to cease and desist. If the institution continues, it is counseled that it may not proceed with the accreditation process.

P. **Correction of Misleading or Inaccurate Information:** DEAC requires that an accredited institution must correct any misleading or inaccurate information it releases. DEAC will notify the institution of the misleading or inaccurate information 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.

XI. INSTITUTIONAL NOTIFICATIONS

- A. **Notification Reports:** The institution informs the Commission immediately of any actions it plans to take itself—or actions taken against it by other agencies—if those actions have the capacity to affect the reputation of the Commission, the institution's good standing with the Commission, and/or its acceptance by the public. This includes the institution's resolution of any complaints in a forthright, prompt, amicable, and equitable manner to the Commission's satisfaction. An effective date is indicated for instances where prior approval of a substantive change is granted. The effective date is not retroactive and is within 30 days of the Commission's final decision of the requested substantive change (except for changes in ownership).
- B. DEAC-accredited institutions contact DEAC staff to apprise them of governmental and media actions that may affect their institution or the Commission.
- C. **Review of Notification Reports:** The Commission reserves the right to order a comprehensive review of an institution whenever it has concerns that the institution is not in compliance with DEAC Accreditation Standards and/or procedures. In all

cases, DEAC allows the institution sufficient time to respond to any findings before a final decision is made regarding the institution's accredited status.

XII. PETITIONS AND WAIVERS

An applicant seeking accreditation or accredited institution submits a petition to the Commission when requesting a waiver of any DEAC Accreditation Standard or procedure and documents the rationale for the request. An institution may submit a petition for an alternative interpretation of a DEAC Accreditation Standard to address the institution's unique mission. Petitions are not requested simply because an institution does not like a standard or does not care to be subject to it. Petitions are only submitted for a significant reason as it applies to the institution's mission.

- A. The Commission may choose to grant a waiver of its standards or procedures where an institution is able to demonstrate through a well-documented petition that:
 - Extenuating circumstances are present that indicate the normal application of the standard or procedure will create an undue hardship on the institution or its students, or
 - The waiver meets the underlying purpose and intent of the standard or procedure.
- B. The institution submits the Petition Request Form and provides supporting documentation. An applicant seeking accreditation submits a fee (see Fees page) along with the Petition Request Form and supporting documentation.
- C. The institution submits the Petition Request Form and supporting documentation at least 45 days prior to the next Commission meeting. The institution should check with staff for the exact submission time frame.
- D. The Commission reviews the institution's Petition Request Form and all documentation and votes to either approve or deny the petition. If a petition is denied, the institution may not resubmit a petition for the same request. Petitions are granted for a period of one year for initial applicants and one accreditation cycle for accredited institutions. The Commission notifies the institution of its decision within 30 days.

XIII. SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

A substantive change is one that may significantly affect an institution's quality, mission, scope, or control. Substantive changes are reviewed to assure that changes in educational offerings, teaching modalities, locations, scope of offerings, and control of the institution are made in accordance with DEAC accreditation standards. The Commission's review of the application seeks to determine whether the substantive change adversely affects the capacity of the institution to continue to meet DEAC accreditation standards. Commission approval is required before a change in the institution's scope of accreditation is granted. The institution seeking a substantive change follows DEAC's process for approval. The following are substantive changes:

- Any significant change in the institution’s core mission;
- Any change in the institution’s name;
- Any change in the institution’s legal status, form of control, or ownership;
- Any change in the institution’s location of the main facility or administrative site or any addition of a facility geographically apart from the main facility;
- Any addition of a new program in a related field of study consistent with the educational offerings reviewed when the institution was last evaluated;
- A change in method of delivery from when the institution was last evaluated;
- A contract with unaccredited organizations for up to 50 percent of educational delivery;
- Any addition of a new program in an unrelated field of study not offered when the institution was last evaluated;
- 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;
- A substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program, including changing from clock hours to credit hours;
- Any addition of an in-residence program component;
- An institution seeking certification to participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs; and
- Engaging in international activities.

The Commission continually monitors changes that are proposed by institutions. When the Commission has ascertained that proposed changes, or an accumulation of changes that singly or in combination are seen to be so significant it results in transforming the institution, the Commission requires a comprehensive re-evaluation of the institution.

Proposed changes may be so substantial that the Commission considers that the institution it granted accreditation to have effectively closed and a new institution is proposed to open. After affording the institution the opportunity to provide information about the changes and whether sufficient continuity of the accredited institution is maintained, the Commission may act to require a total re-evaluation of the institution or to withdraw the accreditation and require the institution to reapply for accreditation. The Commission allows for due process by providing reasonable time for an institution to comply with its request for information and documentation. In all cases, the Commission will allow the institution sufficient time to respond to any findings before making any final decision regarding the institution’s accredited status.

A. CHANGE OF CORE MISSION

1. An institution seeking to substantively depart from its core mission requires prior approval because the institution’s accreditation is predicated on its core mission.
2. A significant alteration in the institution’s core mission signals a change throughout the institution

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a Change of Core Mission Application Part 1, including required documentation, 30 days prior to implementation. The completed application and documentation are presented to the Commission for initial approval.
- b. Once the change of core mission is fully implemented, the institution submits a Change of Core Mission Application Part 2, including required documentation.
- c. The institution receives an on-site visit six months after implementation of the revised core mission is complete. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

B. CHANGE OF NAME

1. An institution seeking to change its name is required to obtain approval from the Commission before implementing 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.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a Change of Name Application Part I, including required documentation, 30 days prior to implementation. The completed application and documentation is presented to the Commission for initial approval.

- b. Once the change of name is implemented, the institution submits a Change of Name Application Part 2, including required documentation.
- 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

C. CHANGE IN LEGAL STATUS, FORM OF CONTROL, OR OWNERSHIP OF INSTITUTION

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: the sale of all or 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 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. 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 the Commission 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.
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 owning, managing, or controlling any educational institutions that entered into bankruptcy or closed, to the detriment of the students.

6. 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.
7. An institution authorized and participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs assumes the responsibility of assuring 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 Application Part 2 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.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a Change of Legal Status, Control, or Ownership Application Part 1, including required documentation, 30 days prior to the proposed change. The completed application and documentation are presented to the Commission for initial approval.
- b. Once the change of legal status, control, or ownership is implemented, the institution submits a Change of Legal Status, Control, or Ownership Application Part 2 including required documentation. For change in ownership, the institution notifies DEAC and provides additional documentation within 10 days after closing.
- c. The institution receives an on-site visit six months after the change of legal status, control, or ownership is complete. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department

of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

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 the Commission.
2. **Location Definition:** A “**location**” is 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 new location.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a Change in Location Application Part 1, including required documentation, 30 days prior to the proposed change. The completed application and documentation are presented to the Commission for approval.
- b. Once the change of location is implemented, the institution submits a Change of Location Application Part 2, including required documentation.
- c. The institution receives an on-site visit within six months of changing their location. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

E. NEW ADMINISTRATIVE SITE

1. **Administrative Site Definition:** An “administrative site” is 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. For DEAC purposes, administrative sites are not listed in DEAC’s Directory of Accredited Institutions. The institution provides evidence that it is approved in the state for the activity that it conducts at the administrative site.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a New Administrative Site Application Part 1, including required documentation 30 days prior to the change.
- b. Once the new administrative site is in operation, the institution submits a New Administrative Site Application Part 2, including required documentation.
- c. The institution receives an on-site visit within six months of implementing the new administrative site. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC’s website (www.deac.org).

F. CHANGE IN EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

The following are considered substantive changes to educational offerings. If an in-residence component is included in the instructional design of a new program, please 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.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a

new degree program in a related field of study:

- a. Submit a New Related-Field Degree Program Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application and selects the courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Section III.B.1 for Degree programs above, DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. Submit a New Related-Field Degree Program Application Part 2, 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

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

- a. Submit a New Related Field Non-Degree Program Application Part 1. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site specialist review fee.
- b. Submit a New Related-Field Non-Degree Program Application Part 2. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

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 in obtaining Commission approval for a change in method of delivery:

- a. Submit a Change in Method of Delivery Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application and then sends the institution a letter requesting access to one completed program. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
 - b. Submit a Change in Method of Delivery Application Part 2 providing 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.
4. **Contracting for Educational Delivery:** An institution that contracts for the delivery of up to 50 percent of its curriculum must obtain approval from the Commission prior to implementing the contract, as follows:
- An institution seeking to contract 26 percent to 50 percent of its curriculum for educational delivery with an accredited organization, or institution, or
 - An institution seeking to contract up to 50 percent of its curriculum for educational delivery with an education provider (unaccredited) or other organization.

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

- a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application 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 Section III above. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application Part 2, including 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

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 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 in obtaining Commission approval for contracting for educational delivery:

- a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application Part 1 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 and notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.
6. **Addition of a New Unrelated-Field Degree Program:** 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 in obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new degree program in an unrelated field of study:

- a. Submit a New Unrelated-Field Degree Program Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application and selects the courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Section III above. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. Submit a New Unrelated Field Degree Program Application Part 2, 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 report and, upon approval, provides notification to the institution within 30 days, permitting enrollment into the degree program.

- c. The institution receives an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new degree 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.
- d. 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

7. **Addition of a New Unrelated-Field Non-Degree Program or Vocational Program:** 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 in obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a new non-degree program or vocational program in an unrelated field of study:

- a. Submit a New Unrelated-Field Non-Degree Program Application Part 1. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission. The institution will receive an invoice for the subject specialist review fee.
- b. Submit a New Unrelated-Field Non-Degree Program Application Part 2. 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. 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

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 in obtaining Commission approval for the addition of a program at a degree or credential level different:

- a. Submit a New Degree/Credential Level Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application and selects the courses required for review based on the selection criteria under Section III above. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission and. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.
- b. Submit a New Degree/Credential Level Application Part 2, 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 report and, upon approval, provides notification to the institution within 30 days, permitting enrollment into the program.
- c. 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.
- d. 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

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 from clock to credit hours is a substantive change.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit a Change of Academic Units of Measurement Application, including additional course/program documentation listed below. The institution submits 25 percent of courses reflecting the revised academic units of measurement.
- b. The institution's Change of Academic Units of Measurement 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.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

H. ADDITION OF AN IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM COMPONENT

1. Adding an in-residence program component is a substantive change.
2. This substantive change applies when the institution implements a required in-residence study component.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for an addition of an in-residence program component:

- a. Submit an In-Residence Component Application Part 1. DEAC reviews the application, evaluates how the residential component complements, enhances, and applies the knowledge acquired from the approved courses for the program. DEAC sends the institution a letter identifying any questions for clarification.
- b. The Commission reviews the submission and, upon approval, provides notification within 30 days to the institution, permitting enrollment into the in-residence portion of the program.
- c. Within 30 days of students attending the in-residence program site, the institution submits an In-Residence Component Application Part 2. The institution receives an on-site visit within six months after the first students begin attending the in-residence program site. 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 all documentation submitted to date and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

I. ENGAGING IN FEDERAL STUDENT ASSISTANCE TITLE IV PROGRAMS

1. To protect future distance education students and to provide direction to institutions as they seek to participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs, DEAC believes it is prudent to provide its member institutions with additional procedures and guidance that are aligned with the published Federal requirements for participation in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs.
2. DEAC limits the percentage of revenue received from Federal student assistance programs in the first year of authorized participation, the adoption of FSA Appendix D default reduction methods at inception, and additional required controls over student loan default levels for any institution that in any published cohort year has a cohort default rate greater than 30 percent. The position of DEAC regarding these additional areas of oversight provides a level of preventive action, where the requirements are more stringent than the published Federal policies and provide the DEAC with additional control over institutions it accredits that elect to participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs.
3. 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. In cases where DEAC standards and Federal regulations differ, the more stringent rules apply.

4. For each institution that elects to participate in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs, DEAC examines the record of the institution's compliance with its Federal program responsibilities under Federal Student Assistance Title IV regulations, based on the most recent "official cohort default rates" published by the U.S. Department of Education; the results of its audited financial statements; and its compliance audits, any program reviews conducted, and any other information that the U.S. Department of Education may provide to DEAC. The Commission takes action, as appropriate, when any of the information suggests the institution may be failing to meet DEAC's standards.
5. 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.
6. **Scope of Activity:** The institution may elect to become a 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 meet DEAC's requirements. (Note: The U.S. Department of Education considers an eligible institution to be the "sum of its eligible programs.")
7. **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 selected by the institution to be FSA Title IV program eligible must have existed in substantially the same length and subject matter as the institution provided during the 24 months prior to the date it applies for eligibility with the U.S. Department of Education.

For the purposes of qualifying institutions to participate in FSA Title IV programs, any DEAC institution that intends to apply 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.

8. **Academic Units of Measurement:** DEAC reviews the institution's policies and procedures for determining the credit hours as defined in 34 CFR 600. 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.

9. **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 the all appropriate governmental 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 Federal aid eligibility.
10. **First-Year 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. "Revenue" is defined as total receipts from all of the institution's distance education students for tuition, books, fees, and all institutional charges, excluding refunds made, regardless of whether they received FSA Title IV programs funds.

Students who enrolled in an institution's programs prior to the date in which FSA Title IV program eligibility is 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 DEAC.

11. **Certification of the Institution by DEAC:** Those institutions that use their accreditation with DEAC as a basis to establish eligibility for FSA Title IV programs must apply to the Commission for approval of all the distance education programs offered by the institution.

Before an accredited institution files an application to the U.S. Department of Education to be either a participating institution or a deferment institution in FSA Title IV programs, it must inform DEAC of its intention to be evaluated and "certified" by DEAC and must be found in compliance with all requirements.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval to participate in FSA Title IV programs:

- a. A key person from the institution successfully completes the DEAC

course entitled, *Realities and Regulations of Federal Student Assistance Programs* and attends the DEAC *Title IV Financial Aid Seminar*. Submit an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Application Part 1.

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.

- b. Submit an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Application Part 2 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 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 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 notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with Section X, Notification and Information Sharing.
12. An institution participating in FSA Title IV programs pays particular attention to documenting and demonstrating compliance with the following requirements, in addition to the DEAC Accreditation Standards.
- a. **Mission:** The institution's educational offerings are in a field of study in which the institution demonstrates competence and strength.
 - 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. The institution maintains records that document that appropriate interactions occur throughout the student's enrollment.

- d. **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 available 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 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.
- e. **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 Federal Student Assistance 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.
- f. **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 students must meet in order to qualify for 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.

- g. **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. 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.

- h. **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 under III.9.c. 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 a FSA Title IV recipient withdraws from an institution.
- i. **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.
- j. **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 collection 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.

- k. **Financial Responsibility:** The institution meets the financial responsibility and administrative capability rules for Federal financial aid participation that includes the annual submission of audited comparative financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years, auditor opinion and management letters, and composite score calculation.
- l. **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.

- m. **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.
- n. **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.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

J. 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, 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 obtains all appropriate external approvals where required, including higher education system administration, government bodies, and DEAC. The institution documents the accepted legal basis for its operation in the host country or country of origin and meets legal requirements of the host country or country of origin.

These are the steps in obtaining Commission approval for this substantive change:

- a. Submit International Activities Application Part 1, including required documentation, and receive prior approval a minimum of 30 days before engaging in international activities. The completed application and documentation are presented to the Commission for initial approval.
- b. Once engagement in international activities is established, the institution submits an International Activities Application Part 2,

including required documentation.

- c. The institution receives an on-site visit in the host country or country of origin within one year after engaging in international activities. An on-site visit is required in each of the countries where an institution offers programs or provides instruction or tutorial services and where student recruitment and other services for these programs are either conducted by an agency or an individual either formally contracted by the institution or through an articulation agreement with an institution or entity in that country. 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 all documentation submitted to date and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards. DEAC notifies the institution 30 days after the Commission decision.

See Substantive Change Flow Chart in Part Four: Appendices for further clarification. All applications are available on DEAC's website (www.deac.org).

XIV. NON-SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

Non-substantive changes are those changes that require the institution to notify DEAC but do not require prior approval. 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 notify the Commission as soon as possible. The institution must submit a Letter of Notice to the Director of Accreditation. The letter must provide 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 provides 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; and checks on the credit history, prior bankruptcy, criminal background, debarment from Federal Student Assistance Title IV Programs, the closing of educational institutions in which they were managers or principals, or the loss of accreditation or state approval to operate an educational institution.

Additional consideration may be required if the background of the proposed new management raises questions concerning compliance with DEAC Standard X as to his/her qualifications.

- B. Degree Program or Non-Degree Course Name or Title Revision:** Institutions submit a letter to the Director of Accreditation and provide the reason for the change under the following circumstances
1. a degree-granting institution that changes the name of a degree program or course without substantively changing the instructional content of the program; or
 2. a non-degree granting institution that changes the name of a program without substantively changing the instructional content.
- The institutions certifies that these are the only revisions to the degree program or non-degree program.

- C. Certificate Program Containing Courses Already Approved:** Degree-granting and non-degree-granting institutions may determine it is appropriate to create a certificate program containing courses already approved to meet a specific marketplace need. Institutions may create certificate programs containing already approved courses that are 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 submits a letter to the Director of Accreditation that provides
- i. The rationale for the implementation;
 - ii. A curriculum map outlining the scope and sequence of the courses for the certificate-level credential;
 - iii. Evidence that offering the certificate-level credential is aligned with industry requirements for entering or advancing in a profession;
 - iv. A statement certifying that the courses used to create the certificate program 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 notification represents a significant departure from its accredited scope.

- D. Changing General Education Requirements or Eliminating a Major Thesis Requirement:** An institution changing general education requirements or eliminating a major thesis requirement submits a letter to the Director of Accreditation outlining the change and 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 or Other Accredited Institution:** An institution can enter into an agreement to incorporate or contract for educational delivery of up to 25 percent of its curriculum with an Approved Quality Curriculum (AQC) provider or other appropriately accredited institution recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) by submitting a letter to the Director of Accreditation 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 contracting for educational delivery appears to not be 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 a letter to the Director of Accreditation, including the names of the courses, the reasons for their addition, and how they align with the existing programs and institutional mission.

DEAC reserves the right to direct the institution to the substantive change process when it appears that the change notification represents a significant departure from its accredited scope.

- G. **Discontinuing Courses or Programs:** If an institution decides to discontinue a course or program, it submits a letter to the Director of Accreditation 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 establish a division must notify the Commission in writing and provide a complete description of how the institution will disclose the division as part of the broader educational offerings. A “**division**” of a DEAC institution typically refers to 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. For example, the distance education institution advertises its degree-granting programs under the name “Distance Education University,” its vocational programs under “Distance Education Institute,” and its high school programs under “Distance Education High School.” Another example is the company, Distance Education Company, which offers several programs and advertises each program by a different name, such as Distance Education Career School or Distance Education Photography School. 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 a letter to the Director of Accreditation at least 30 days prior to the closure. The letter provides 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.

XV. TEACH-OUT PLANS

- A. Institutions submit a comprehensive, written teach-out plan for its enrolled students for DEAC approval when any of the following events occur:
 1. The U.S. Department of Education has notified the Commission of an action against the institution pursuant to Federal Regulations, Section 487 (f) [20 USC 1099 b].
 2. The Commission has withdrawn accreditation from an institution.
 3. The Commission has directed the institution to Show Cause as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.
 4. A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies DEAC that an institution's license or legal authorization has been or will be revoked.
 5. The institution has notified the Commission that it intends to cease operations. or
 6. The Commission has made a determination that an institution appears to lack sufficient resources to sustain effective operation in meeting its obligations to students or enters bankruptcy.

- B. **Teach-Out Plan:** At a minimum, the proposed teach-out plan must assure that all students who enrolled in 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. Two approaches to teach-out plans:
 - a. The institution plans to teach-out its own students; or
 - 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 approach include:
 - a. A listing, by name and student number, of all students in each program and their estimated completion/graduation dates, the status of unearned tuition, all current refunds due and account balances;
 - b. Arrangements for disposition of all student records, including educational, accounting, and financial aid records, in an accessible location and in accordance with applicable legal requirements in the event the institution closes;
 - c. Instructions on how curricula and learning management software may be accessed to conduct a teach-out;
 - d. An explanation, accompanied by appropriate supporting

documentation and timelines, of how the closing institution will notify students in the event of closure and, if applicable, how the closing institution will notify the students of the teach-out;

- e. 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.
- f. A statement showing evidence that state regulations regarding any student protection funds and/or bonds are followed, if applicable;
- g. A statement that describes any additional charges/fees and notification to students about the charges/fees; and
- h. A description of what financial resources will be used to make student refunds or fund the teach-out.

3. DEAC reviews any teach-out plan that includes a program accredited by another recognized accrediting agency and will notify that accrediting agency of any approval or rejection.

C. **Teach-Out Agreement:** DEAC approves teach-out agreements only if the agreement is consistent with DEAC standards and the criteria listed below and provides for the equitable treatment of students. The teach-out institution must have the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program of acceptable quality and that is reasonably similar in content and structure to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations. The teach-out institution must also be able to remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students.

D. When a DEAC institution enters into a teach-out agreement voluntarily or at the DEAC's direction, the agreement must be approved by DEAC prior to implementation. In such cases, the institution must provide documentation to demonstrate that the educational programs provided by the teach-out institution are of acceptable quality.

The following elements are 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 the institution currently offers programs similar to those at the closing institution.
2. The agreement states that the student will be provided access to all the program of instruction, without additional cost, for which the student originally contracted and paid 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 as to not require students 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 have already enrolled but who had not yet started their program of study at the closing institution or who 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 curricula 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 back to DEAC on a periodic basis on the status of the teach-out.
8. The agreement provides for appropriate notification to the Commission, federal, and state authorities.
9. The agreement complies with applicable federal and state laws.

E. 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, DEAC will work with the U.S. Department of Education and the appropriate state agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

XVI. ANNUAL REPORTS

- A. Maintaining Accreditation:** The institution maintains accreditation on an ongoing basis by remaining in continuous compliance with all accreditation standards, procedures, and eligibility requirements. The institution is in continuous operation; educates students in accordance with its mission; fulfills all DEAC reporting requirements in a timely manner; maintains compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements; and pays all DEAC dues, fees, and evaluation fees as applicable, on a timely basis.
- B. 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. The Annual Report and all accompanying documentation are due to DEAC in accordance with established formats and timelines. The Commission monitors significant growth

or decline in institutional enrollment through the data submitted in an institution's Annual Report. When the Commission determines that an institution's Annual Report indicates significant growth or decline in institutional enrollment, the Commission may require the submission of additional information as set forth below.

- C. **Significant Growth or Decline in Enrollments:** The institution is required to report and explain the reasons for any significant growth or decline in enrollments. DEAC defines significant growth in enrollments as the following:

If in a calendar year an institution reports:

- Fewer than 300 new students, more than 100 percent increase;
 - Between 300-1,000 new students, more than 75 percent increase;
 - Between 1,000-9,000 new students, more than 50 percent increase; and
 - More than 9,000 new students, more than 25 percent increase.
1. If an institution reports "significant growth in enrollments," 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 for the increased number of students being served. The institution identifies the programs with 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.
 2. 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. A "significant decline in enrollments" is defined as an enrollment decline of 25 percent or more since the last Annual Report.

- D. **Significant Growth or Decline in the Number of Programs:** The institution is required to report and explain the reasons for any significant growth or decline in the number of programs offered. DEAC defines significant growth in the number of programs as the following:

If in a calendar year an institution reports:

- 1-3 programs; it adds more than two new programs;
 - 4-10 programs; it adds more than three new programs;
 - 11-20 programs; it adds more than four new programs;
 - 21 or more programs; it adds more than six new programs.
1. 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 for the increased number of programs being offered.

2. 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, the impact on staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans. A “significant decline in the number of programs” is defined as discontinuing 25 percent or more of its programs since the last Annual Report.
3. 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). The addition or discontinuation of courses or concentrations follow the Non-Substantive Change procedures under II.14.f. and g. The addition of new programs follows the Substantive Change procedures under II.13.f.

E. Significant Changes in Financial Condition: The institution is required to report and explain the reasons for any significant change in financial condition since the last Annual Report.

1. An institution submits audited or reviewed comparative financial statements if it reports a loss in its net income or a deficit in working capital or total equity/fund balance. The Commission reviews the financial statements and determines whether further reporting is required or other appropriate action is necessary.
2. 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, no later than June 30.

F. 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 and significant changes 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.

1. The Commission may place limits on an institution’s future enrollment or program growth if ongoing compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or procedures is a concern. The Commission may request an institution to provide additional supporting documentation regarding significant growth or decline in enrollments or programs.
2. DEAC staff notify institutions of their compliance with established student satisfaction benchmarks as compared to similar courses or programs offered at

peer DEAC-accredited institutions. If an institution's student satisfaction rate falls below 75 percent, or if completion and graduation rates are not within 15 percentage points of the mean rate for institutions within the assigned peer group, the institution explains the reasons for not meeting established benchmarks and documents corrective actions taken. The Commission reviews the institution's response and supporting documentation and notifies the institution if further action is required.

3. Information provided by an institution participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs is reviewed by the Commission to verify 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, results of its audited comparative financial statements, its compliance audit, program review information, and any other information provided to DEAC by the U.S. Department of Education. The Commission takes action if any information suggests the institution is failing to meet DEAC accreditation standards and reserves the right to investigate the allegations. The Commission 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.

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

- A. **DEAC Complaints:** Complaints that reasonably allege instances of noncompliance with DEAC accreditation standards by accredited institutions, active applicants, and DEAC evaluators, Commissioners, and staff are investigated in a fair and timely manner.

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. All complaints should be submitted using this form. For those who cannot access the Internet, written complaints will be accepted provided they include the complainant's name and contact information and a release from the complainant(s) to DEAC. Where circumstances warrant, the complainant may remain anonymous to the institution, but all identifying information must be given to DEAC.

Written complaints must contain the following: the basis of any allegation of noncompliance with DEAC standards and procedures; all relevant names and dates and a brief description of the actions forming the basis of the complaint; copies of any available documents or materials that support the allegations; a release authorizing DEAC to forward a copy of the complaint, including identification of the complaint(s) to the institution. In cases of anonymous complaints or where the complainant requests for his/her name to be kept confidential, DEAC considers how to proceed and whether the anonymous complaint sets forth reasonable and credible

information that an institution may be in violation of DEAC's standards and whether the complainant's identify is not necessary to investigate.

B. Definition of Complaint: A complaint is defined as notification to DEAC by any person or entity (including, but not limited to, any student, faculty, or staff of an accredited institution; any member of the general public; any representative of a federal, state, or local government; and any member of any other institution or organization) that sets forth reasonable and credible information that:

- An accredited institution;
- An applicant institution; or
- The Evaluators, Commissioners, or DEAC staff are not in compliance with one or more of DEAC's accreditation standards.

Where issues of educational services, student services, or tuition are concerned, a student complainant must have exhausted all efforts to resolve his/her complaint with the institution before considering filing a complaint with DEAC. Where issues of educational quality or compliance with DEAC standards or procedures are not central to the complaint, the DEAC will refer the complaint and/or the complainant to the appropriate federal or state agency or private entity with jurisdiction over the subject matter of the complaint and may provide a copy to the institution.

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, DEAC will not intervene on behalf of individuals in cases where the situation giving rise to the complaint had occurred so long ago that investigating and ascertaining the facts might prove to be problematic. The Executive Director will exercise professional judgment in determining which cases meet these criteria. In addition, if, for any reason, DEAC suspects any type of unethical behavior, including fraud and abuse, by an applicant or accredited institution, DEAC reserves the right to investigate the allegations. DEAC is obligated under Federal regulations [CFR 602.27(a)(6)] to report to the U.S. Secretary of Education any institution it has reason to believe is failing to meet its Federal Student Assistance Title IV program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud and abuse.

C. Records of Complaints: DEAC maintains records of all 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 are kept for a period of 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. The complaints are analyzed according to

how the institution handles them or how they were resolved.

In addition, all other complaint files are tabulated and summarized and presented at each meeting of DEAC. The summary provides an analysis of any complaints unresolved, categories of complaints by nature and source, and any other information the Commission desires regarding the record of complaints received by the DEAC.

- D. Complaints Against Accredited Institutions:** When DEAC accredits an institution, it expects the institution to remain in compliance with all DEAC standards for accreditation throughout the accreditation period granted. Therefore, one of the principal concerns of the DEAC when it receives a complaint about an accredited institution is whether the institution is in compliance with the published standards and procedures. The burden of proof rests with the institution to prove that it is meeting DEAC's published standards and procedures at all times, including proving compliance after accreditation is awarded. Another concern of DEAC involves the methods, policies, philosophy, and procedures of the institution for handling complaints on an ongoing basis. DEAC expects its accredited institutions to have operational procedures in place for fairly and promptly resolving complaints so that they do *not* become a matter for concern by outside agencies. DEAC will consider a complaint even if the institution is involved in litigation with DEAC or other third parties. Therefore, in investigating a specific complaint against an accredited institution, DEAC also examines whether or not the institution has effective methods for handling student problems on a routine basis. In so doing, DEAC looks to see if the institution's procedures are equitable, consistently applied, and effective in resolving problems.

Finally, DEAC is 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 assure that similar complaints do not become repetitive or routine.

- E. 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. After receipt of the complaint, the Commission staff will send a letter or e-mail to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the process the DEAC will follow in investigating the complaint.
 2. DEAC staff will conduct an initial review of the complaint 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, the Executive Director (acting on behalf of the Commission) will send a request to the complainant. If the requested information is not received within **15 days**, the complaint may be considered abandoned and may not be investigated by DEAC.
 3. If the Executive Director 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, the complaint may be considered closed and will not be investigated by DEAC.
4. If the Executive Director determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations reasonably suggest but do not provide enough information to ascertain that an institution may not be in compliance with DEAC standards and procedures, the Executive Director will notify the institution that a complaint has been filed. The notice will summarize the allegations, identify the DEAC standards or procedures that were allegedly violated, and provide a copy of the original complaint to the institution. The institution will be given **30 days** to provide a response, except for:
 - a. In cases of advertising violations, DEAC staff forwards a copy of the advertisement to the institution, citing the standard that may have been violated. The institution is required to respond within **15 days**.
 - b. If a news article or media broadcast carries a negative report on a DEAC-accredited institution, 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.
 5. The Executive Director will review the complaint and the institution's response for compliance with the accrediting standards and procedures.
 6. If the Executive Director concludes that the allegations do not establish there has been a violation of standards or procedures, he/she will consider the complaint closed, and no further action is required.
 7. If the Executive Director concludes that the allegations may establish a violation of DEAC standards and/or procedures, he/she may take one of the following actions:
 - a. Postpone the final action 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. In the case of postponement of action, the complainant will be kept informed of the status of the complaint and its final action. NOTE: The failure of 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, on the basis of the information provided, the DEAC has determined that the institution is failing to meet the DEAC standards and that the DEAC is taking appropriate action. Such action may include requiring the institution to take specific corrective action and report back to the Commission and/or conducting a Special Visit to the institution on an announced or unannounced basis. If

circumstances warrant, the Commission may initiate action, including a show cause proceeding, that may result in the termination of the institution's accreditation. If appropriate, Commission actions may also include referring the matter to Federal, State, or local agencies for review and possible action.

8. In all instances, the Executive Director will send a letter to the complainant and the institution regarding the final disposition of the complaint, and a record of the complaint will be kept on file at the DEAC office subject to DEAC's document retention policies.

Note: 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 the DEAC's policy on complaints and will be referred to DEAC for consideration and action.

9. An adverse action against an institution arising from a complaint will not be taken until the institution has had an opportunity to respond to the complaint within the time frames set forth by DEAC.

F. Complaints about Applicant Institutions: DEAC posts on its website and publishes a list of applicant institutions and encourages third-party comments. DEAC's Third Party Comments addresses receiving, processing, reviewing, and acting on third-party comments. If a complaint (as defined above) is received about an applicant institution, the procedures followed for handling the complaint are the same as for handling a complaint about an accredited institution (see above).

XVIII. UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

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

XIX. 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 of any accreditation standards or procedures that need to be strengthened.
3. **DEAC Committee:** The Standards Committee makes recommendations to the Commission to continuously refine and revise standards to assure 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 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 surveys 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.

12. **Industry Representatives and Employers:** DEAC surveys the employers of graduates of its member-institutions.

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 resources. Elements of the systematic review process include:

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 Standards Committee collects feedback from member institutions and other interested constituencies as part of the review process. The Committee creates special task forces to address the evaluation of the information and determine whether current accreditation standards or procedures need revision. The DEAC Standards Committee meets twice a year at the DEAC Annual Conference and Fall Workshop.
3. DEAC staff propose revisions to accreditation standards and procedures to assure continued compliance with recognition criteria from the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
4. DEAC routinely surveys graduates and their employers and publishes the data collected every five years. The results of these surveys inform the Commission of any revisions needed to accreditation standards or procedures.
5. 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: The following process is followed for adopting revisions to DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures.

1. All recommendations for revision to current accreditation standards and procedures are collected by DEAC staff and submitted to the DEAC Standards Committee for initial review. The DEAC Standards Committee proposes revised language or develops new accreditation standards or procedures based on the feedback received. Once the proposed language is approved by the DEAC Standards Committee, 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. Not all proposed changes are reviewed by the DEAC Standards Committee. The Commission collaborates with DEAC staff to revise accreditation standards and procedures as necessary to assure continued compliance with Federal regulations.
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. The proposed language is sent to recipients of DEAC's mailing list (e.g., member institutions, non-member institutions, government agencies, other accrediting agencies, and other constituencies) and sent via DEAC publications. Comments are solicited within an established timeframe (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 requests and receives comments on recommendations or proposed language at least 30 days prior to its next scheduled meeting to allow time for the Commission to review feedback before formally adopting the proposed language. The Commission reviews and carefully considers all comments before making a final decision.
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 state in II.6. Interested parties are provided an opportunity to comment on the change as soon as practicable after publication.
5. The Commission can adopt accreditation standards and procedures as proposed, adopt with changes or modifications, defer action until further study and consideration is given, or reject the proposed changes outright. Once final accreditation standards or procedures are adopted, the Commission establishes the effective date providing a reasonable time for compliance by member institutions. The entire process typically takes six months. The Commission

makes necessary changes within 12 months after determining changes to accreditation standards or procedures are needed.

E. Circulation of Accreditation Standards and Procedures: Upon final adoption by the Commission, the DEAC Executive Director announces the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures and any actions necessary for implementation to the public and relevant stakeholders. Effective dates for the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures are included in the announcement, along with the date institutions are required to come into full compliance. 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 *DEAC Accreditation Handbook* is revised and updated annually in January. The *Accreditation Handbook* is made available on the DEAC website. Printed copies are made available upon request. An "update sheet" is provided noting changes made since the previous edition.
 - b. DEAC publishes the "update sheet" on its website for review by evaluators and subject specialists.
 - c. DEAC routinely conducts webinars, seminars, workshop sessions, and issues guidance through Bulletins or emails on interpreting and applying new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.
 - d. DEAC updates its online training manuals and courses with new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.
 - e. DEAC staff review the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures with on-site evaluators before each on-site visit.

PART THREE: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

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 implements compliance with standards and procedures within the context of its mission assuring that educational offerings and administrative practices are of sufficient quality to achieve the mission. 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 and is appropriate to the level of study offered. The mission establishes the institution's identity within the educational community and guides the development of educational offerings.

B. REVIEW AND PUBLICATION OF THE MISSION

The leadership, faculty, staff, administrators, and other stakeholders regularly review the mission to assure continued institutional viability. The mission is widely disseminated and readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

C. IMPLEMENTATION 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 identifies the institution and is regularly reviewed by all stakeholders. The institution measures ongoing achievement of its mission. The mission guides planning for future growth.

II. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Two fundamental attributes of institutional sustainability are monitoring effectiveness and planning for strategic growth. An institution implements a comprehensive effectiveness plan incorporating a feedback loop that results in administrative and academic enhancements. Additionally, an institution plans for future growth and financial stability through focused

activities within an effective strategic planning program. 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 and analysis of data used to improve operations, educational offerings, and services.

B. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The institution engages in strategic planning that aligns with and demonstrates a shared commitment to the mission. The institution's planning process involves all areas of the institution's operations (e.g., admissions, academic, technology, etc.) in identifying strategic initiatives and goals by evaluating external and internal trends for continued growth. At a minimum, the strategic plan addresses finances, academics, technology, admissions, marketing, personnel, and sustainability. The strategic plan is reviewed and updated annually using established metrics designed to measure achievement of strategic planning activities.

IMPACT STATEMENT

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

III. PROGRAM OUTCOMES, CURRICULA, AND MATERIALS

INTRODUCTION

Program outcomes reflect academic competencies at an 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 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 **nine (9) 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 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, dissertations, are clearly stated.

2. Capstone projects, if required, are consistent with academic and professional standards based on commonly accepted higher education practices and 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 content is supported by reliable research and practice. The organization and presentation of the curricula and instructional materials are designed using sound principles of learning and are grounded in distance education instructional design principles. The curricula and instructional materials are accurate and reflect current knowledge and practice. Effective procedures are continuously used to keep curricula and instructional materials 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 implements 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. The institution convenes an Advisory Council meeting at least annually to provide the institution with advice on the current level of skills, knowledge, and abilities individuals need for entry into the occupation. As a part of the institution's effectiveness planning activities, the Advisory Council provides 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 place an emphasis on principles and theory 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 that are designed to develop essential academic skills for enhanced and continued learning. General education courses convey broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develop skills and attitudes that contribute to civic engagement and advance professional attainment.
4. ASSOCIATE DEGREE
Associate degrees are awarded in academic or professional subjects whether for terminal career or for 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 objectives. 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 an associate degree program.

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 training and must include a comprehensive curriculum with appropriate coursework to achieve the program objectives. 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 expectations. Institutions establish whether graduate courses are completed in a prescribed sequence to facilitate student achievement of program objectives. Master's degree programs are a minimum of 36 semester credit hours or 54 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 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. The professional doctoral degree program graduate demonstrates 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. The program of study requires 60 graduate-level semester credit hours or their equivalent beyond the master's degree with a maximum of 15 semester 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 after the bachelor's degree.

- b. Professional doctoral degrees require dissertations or capstone projects involving original contributions to the field of study and 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, 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.
- c. If the final research project or dissertation involves human research, the institution must require prior formal review and approval for all 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 received 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.)

E. CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT

Qualified persons competent in distance education instructional practices and experts in their subjects or fields develop the content of curricula and prepare instructional materials.

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 for 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 is accountable for demonstrating that each course and program requires the appropriate amount of work 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 and libraries that are appropriate for the achievement of program learning outcomes.

1. UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Resources are systematically and regularly evaluated to assure 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 resources. Additional allocation of resources is reflective of educational offerings to support increases in student enrollment and to assure continued access to appropriate educational media and learning materials.

2. GRADUATE DEGREES

In addition to the forgoing, graduate students are provided with access to library 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 implements 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. DOCTORAL DEGREES

The institution assesses student achievement through multiple means of evaluation, including qualifying examinations, comprehensive examinations, and dissertation or final research project. The institution requires students to successfully complete a comprehensive examination when all coursework is completed and prior to commencing work on the dissertation or final research project.

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 the examination 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 examinations, 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 examinations at appropriate intervals throughout the program of study. Proctors use valid government-issued photo identification or other means to confirm student identity.

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, 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 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 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 learner that enhances 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.

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 STUDENT PROGRESS

The institution implements a satisfactory academic progress policy and discloses this policy to students. All 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.

F. GRADING POLICIES

Student 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. Students are informed of their academic progress and standing in the program at regular intervals throughout their enrollment.

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 maintained permanently in either print or digital form.

H. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

The institution implements policies to 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 implements policies and procedures for responding to, addressing, and readdressing, as appropriate, student complaints.

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 procedure is available to all students. The institution defines what it 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 assures 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, as appropriate.

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 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 readily available. A clearly articulated process to address student complaints is implemented, and the institution utilizes data gathered from this process to observe patterns and trends that are reviewed and incorporated into ongoing institutional improvement efforts.

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 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 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 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 improve student learning. The data received from these evaluations provide the institution with timely, accurate, qualitative, and quantitative information that is meaningful and used by faculty, administrators, and various stakeholders to measure institutional effectiveness and to analyze 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 maintain overall 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 individualized instructional service to each student. The institution encourages and regularly monitors continued professional development for all administrators, department heads, instructors/faculty, and staff for the benefit of the institution and its students. The institution documents procedures assuring the hiring of qualified individuals. It demonstrates a 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 leadership possesses the academic credentials, background, knowledge, ethics, and experience necessary to guide the instructional activities of the institution.

B. CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER OR EDUCATION DIRECTOR

The institution designates a chief academic officer, education director, or other similar oversight position. This individual possesses the overall administrative responsibilities for the educational program(s); for the educational, editorial, and research activities within the 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 provides 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/instructors' resumes and official transcripts 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 performance using clear, consistent procedures. The institution assures that faculty are appropriately involved and engaged in the curriculum and instructional aspects of the educational offerings.

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. POSTSECONDARY

Faculty possess earned credentials awarded by appropriately accredited institutions. In judging faculty competence, consideration is given to the academic preparation and experience of each faculty member consistent with accepted higher education practices. Faculty teaching courses that are part of a degree in a specialized field possess the appropriate credential in the subject being taught and demonstrate expertise in the subject field.

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 undergraduate level general education courses at the undergraduate level 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

Master's program faculty have earned a doctoral/terminal degree relevant to the program being offered, consistent with accepted educational practices of other similar programs. Faculty are assigned responsibilities based on their degree qualifications and area(s) of expertise.

6. 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.

7. 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 demonstrates effective operations by establishing policies and procedures for delineating the roles and responsibilities for academic leadership and faculty for 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 maintain responsibility 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 academic personnel, including documentation of initial and ongoing professional development, as a component for all positions. The institution documents the success of academic personnel through clear, consistent procedures designed to evaluate performance.

VII. ADVERTISING, PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE, AND RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL

INTRODUCTION

All advertising and promotion is current, ethical, and accurately reflects institutional 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. Recruitment involves any institutional personnel who engage in activities to attract or enroll students. 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; affirmatively discloses that programs are offered via distance education; and appropriately discloses any occupational opportunities as applicable. All promotional literature, catalogs, enrollment agreements, manuals, and websites list the institution's full name and physical address. At a minimum, all advertisements include the institution's city, state, and web address. The institution complies with the Catalog Disclosures Check List.

1. All advertisements and promotional literature 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. Advertisements are appropriately published under a section identified for education, training, or instruction and do not imply that employment is being offered.
 - 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 their own sponsored links on Internet search engines.
3. The institution discloses on its catalog, website, and enrollment agreements that the acceptance of earned credits is determined by the receiving institution.
4. The institution adheres to applicable catalog, website, and enrollment agreement disclosures check lists, 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 do not exceed a nominal value of \$100 annually.
6. The institution permanently archives its catalogs.

B. INSTITUTION AND COURSE ACCREDITED-STATUS RECOGNITION

The institution publishes and accurately reflects its accredited status. The institution uses the official DEAC accreditation logo and statement of accreditation in its advertisements, promotional literature, letterheads, and website. The institution states its accredited status in its catalog and on its website. DEAC's name, address, telephone number, and web address are published in the institution's catalog. An institution refers to its accredited status as follows:

- Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
 - DEAC Accredited
1. The accredited 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."
 2. The accredited 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)."
 3. The accredited institution publicly corrects any misleading or inaccurate information it releases on its accreditation status, contents of its onsite team reports from accreditation-related visits, and/or actions taken by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission with respect to the institution.
 4. 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. CONTROL OF STUDENT RECRUITMENT PERSONNEL

The institution demonstrates that ethical processes and procedures are followed throughout the recruitment of prospective students. Recruitment personnel are defined as any administrators, staff, faculty, or contractors who enroll prospective students. Minimum ethical practices and procedures are identified below.

1. The institution takes full responsibility for the actions, statements, and conduct of its student 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 student recruitment personnel and provides them with accurate information concerning employment and remuneration. Recruitment personnel are provided with a sales manual or appropriate materials covering applicable procedures, policies, and presentations. The institution demonstrates it routinely monitors its student recruitment personnel or independent organizations that provide prospective applicant names to assure they are in compliance with all state, federal, and DEAC recruitment practices.

2. All student recruitment personnel, including telemarketing staff, conform to applicable federal and state laws; do not use any title that indicates special qualifications for career guidance, advising, or registration; and do not publish advertisements without the appropriate written authorization from the institution.
3. If an institution provides incentives for making referrals, the incentive must not exceed a value of \$100 a year.

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 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 publication.

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 the mission, values, and student population served by the educational offerings. 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 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 basis for the admission decision.

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 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 (e.g., high school diploma, general educational development tests [GED], or self-certification statement) that applicants possess a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent at the time of admission.

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 (e.g., high school diploma or general educational development tests [GED]) that applicants possess a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent at the time of admission. 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 applicants have completed 30 graduate-level credit hours prior to admission.

E. ADMISSION ACCEPTANCE AND DENIAL

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

F. TRANSFER CREDITS

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.

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 may 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.

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 Enrollment Agreements Disclosures Check List.

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 on 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 on the enrollment agreement. Requirements for type size, notice to buyer, and computations examples, as applicable, are observed.
5. If there is a separate payment contract, the contract is incorporated by reference on enrollment agreement.

IMPACT STATEMENT

A DEAC-accredited institution demonstrates a commitment to ethical enrollment practices through fair and transparent admission 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 provide the scope and nature of the educational offerings.

IX. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES, CANCELLATIONS, AND REFUND POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

The institution establishes equitable tuition, cancellation, refund, and collection policies and procedures. All tuition costs and instructional fees, including textbooks, are readily available to students. Tuition and refund policies are disclosed on all enrollment agreements.

Collection procedures are conducted ethically, and consideration is given in order to retain students' good will. 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 [on an enrollment agreement or similar contractual document] before enrollment. Costs must include tuition, educational services, textbooks, and instructional materials and any specific fees associated with enrollment, such as application and registration fees, as well as 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 for 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 on the enrollment agreement or similar contractual document prior to enrollment.

B. CANCELLATIONS

A student's notification of cancellation may be conveyed to the institution in any manner. 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.

1. 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).
2. Upon cancellation, a student whose costs for education are paid in full, but not eligible for a refund, is entitled to receive all materials including kits and equipment.

3. 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 on 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, 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, 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 on 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 6 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, library service fees, plus a percentage of tuition paid by the student in accordance with the following refund schedule:

Percentage Completed by the	Percentage of Tuition Returned to	Percentage of Tuition
------------------------------------	------------------------------------------	------------------------------

Student	the Student Minus the Application and/or Registration Fee	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 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 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 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.

C. SUCCESSION PLAN

The institution's written plan describes 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 growth of the institution. They support the mission and values through the implementation of collaborative and continuous improvements that provide for the delivery of high quality distance education. The members of the institution's governance structure demonstrate a commitment to all stakeholders by developing a succession and continuity 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 growth and 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. 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 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.

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's (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.
3. Financial statements submitted must include the institution's fiscal statement for either the most recent fiscal year end or the 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 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. Institutional facilities, equipment, supplies, 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 and future growth. 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 adequately equipped to handle the educational program(s) of the institution.

1. 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.

B. 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 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.

C. 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.

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 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.