



Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC)

Call for Comment on Proposed Changes to the *Accreditation Handbook*

February 9, 2022

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) is seeking comment on proposed revisions to the *Accreditation Handbook*. The proposed revisions have been developed as a part of DEAC's commitment to a regular review of its standing policies, procedures, and operations in order to improve them and to support its institutions' efforts to review and improve their operations.

The proposed changes are primarily intended to reflect ongoing developments in the provision of distance education, the experiences of DEAC institutions, and a consideration of the new regulations governing the U.S. Department of Education's recognition of accrediting organizations for postsecondary education that became effective in July 2020. As part of this initiative, and in accordance with Section XXIV.D, Part Two of the *Accreditation Handbook*, the Commission is soliciting comments with respect to the proposed revisions from all DEAC member institutions, other relevant constituencies, and the general public. DEAC expects to make changes on its website and in its standard forms to reflect the revisions, when finally approved after review of comments from member institutions, the public, and other relevant parties. The proposed revisions for which comments are now solicited were approved by the Commission at its January 2022 meeting.

A summary of the proposed changes is set forth below. However, please be aware that the summary provides an overview only and does not reflect all of the proposed changes. The complete set of proposed changes is available on DEAC's website at [Documents Out For Public Comment \(deac.org\)](https://www.deac.org/documents-out-for-public-comment). You are advised to review the attached redlined documents, which reflect each change. The Commission does not believe that any of the proposed revisions constitute a material, substantive change in DEAC's current operations. However, and as stated above, the revisions are valuable in that they provide useful clarification, detail and updating of existing language in the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*.

Primary changes in Parts One and Two of the *Accreditation Handbook* include the following:

- Clarifying that DEAC's Board of Directors, which is responsible for corporate governance and oversight of DEAC, also serves as the Accrediting Commission, the body responsible for oversight and decision-making in the accreditation process. Please see primary definitional language in Part One, with conforming terminology throughout Part Two.
- Making clear that events such as governmental indictments or other enforcement activities against an institution or its principals require institutions to provide notice to DEAC of the same – Part Two, Section III (I) and Part Three, Standard X (B).

- Providing a specific time frame for receiving public and third-party comments on institutions seeking initial or renewal of accreditation from DEAC – Section VII (A & B).
- Aligning language on public notices with Department of Education requirements – Sections IX and XV (A, C, E & F).
- Providing additional clarification as to how an accreditation deferral action is distinguished from a show cause action – Section IX (B & C).
- Providing additional detail as to the procedure for special visits directed by the Commission – Section X(A).
- Expressly stating DEAC’s long-standing position that it does not allow distance education institutions to establish an “additional location” or “branch campus” as these terms are defined in 34 CFR 600.2 – Section XVIII(A).
- Clarifying and adding more detail in certain contexts to the substantive change approval process – Section XVIII.
- Streamlining the substantive change procedures for Engaging in Federal Student Assistance Title IV Programs – Section XVIII (J).
- Incorporating transfer of credit provisions within a written teach-out agreement – Section XXI (C).
- Streamlining and clarifying DEAC’s written complaint procedures, including, without limitation, the addition of a specific time frame for institutions to maintain student complaint records – Section XXII.
- Updating and streamlining the language for the process followed by DEAC in proposing and adopting revisions to DEAC accreditation standards, policies, and processes when considering comments on proposed changes to the *Accreditation Handbook* – Section XXIV.

The proposed revisions to Part Three, Accreditation Standards, *DEAC Accreditation Handbook* include:

- Reinforcing DEAC’s long-standing position that it does not use as a negative factor an institution’s religious mission-based policies, decisions, and practices as these may be reflected in the institution’s curricula, faculty, facilities, student support services, and recruiting and admissions policies. Please see the new Introduction Section, Part Three, Accreditation Standards.
- A change that corresponds to revisions in Part Two, Section XXII on written complaint procedures to establish a five-year time frame for maintaining student complaint records – Standard IV(J).
- Language to clarify the value and use of any institution-branded materials or nominal gifts offered to current or prospective students if or when institutions utilize such incentives as part of their recruitment practices – Standard VII (A)(5) & (C)(3).
- Provisions that would allow the Commission to require an institution to submit audited financial statements within a time frame specifically determined by the Commission in the

event that circumstances raise serious concerns about an institution's financial capacity and stability – Standard XI (D).

As referenced above, there are a number of additional revisions made to Parts One, Two, and Three of the Handbook that are primarily editorial refinements for consistency, clarity, and conforming language and that DEAC does not believe are materially substantive in nature. Nevertheless, the Commission is calling attention to all proposed changes and revisions and is inviting institutions, stakeholders, and the public to offer their comments.

As you review the Call for Comment documents, please note that new language is indicated by red, underlined font and deletions by ~~striketrough~~.

Please provide any written comments on or before March 11, 2022 using the Call for Comment form [linked here](#) and [on the DEAC website under Public Notices, Call for Comment](#). The Commission will review all such comments at a special meeting to be held in late March.