


DEAC
DISTANCE EDUCATION ACCREDITING COMMISSION

# ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

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

JANUARY 1, 2025

# *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*

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

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# Part One: Introduction

## Purpose of the Accreditation Handbook

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

Institutions interested in pursuing DEAC accreditation should use this *Accreditation Handbook* as they organize and conduct their self-evaluations, as they evaluate their readiness to meet the rigors inherent in voluntary accreditation, and as they work to maintain the standards of DEAC. The *Accreditation Handbook* also offers guidance to newly established distance education institutions seeking to build or refine their policies and practices, whether or not they apply for DEAC accreditation.

## About DEAC

Accreditation in education began over a century ago. The movement started as a public reaction to the extreme differences between educational institutions that initially appeared to be similar. Accrediting bodies were voluntarily organized by educators to develop and implement common standards and procedures to measure educational quality. From its inception, accreditation has been a nongovernmental, completely voluntary, peer group method of identifying educational institutions or programs that meet published standards of quality. A variety of regional, national, and professional accrediting organizations came into being in the early 1900s in response to the public's demand for reliable indicators of institutional quality.

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

increasing diversity of distance learning programs. In 2015, the organization's name was rebranded as the Distance Education Accrediting Commission to reflect its primary function as an independent accrediting organization.

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

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

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

## What is Distance Education?

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

Distance education has a rich history dating back to the early 18th century when its predominant medium of instruction was printed materials that were mailed to individual students and allowed for little to no interaction with faculty members. Distance education today has taken advantage of technological innovations and has become a multi-faceted avenue for providing instruction through various mediums to meet the learning needs of a diverse, growing student population. Educational institutions can reach across borders and

extend globally to build strong learner communities through the use of technological tools such as social media outlets, podcasts, various forms of asynchronous and synchronous communication, and videoconferencing. Advancements within the field of distance education have provided an increasing population of students the opportunity to earn degrees and gain knowledge and skills in various subject areas.

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

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

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

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

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

1. Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor;
2. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student;
3. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and
4. Correspondence education is not distance education."

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

For the purposes of the *DEAC Accreditation Handbook*, the term "distance education" is used

throughout, whether the instructional model is correspondence, online, or direct assessment.

## Why Become Accredited?

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

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

## What is DEAC Accreditation and What Are its Benefits?

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

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

## For Students, DEAC Accreditation…

- Provides students with confidence that the institution offering programs ranging from high school through the professional doctoral degree and non-degree certificates has been evaluated and meets rigorous standards established by education industry

professionals.
- Increases and enhances employment opportunities for students who graduate from an accredited institution. Graduates want assurances that, upon completion of the program, they have the requisite knowledge and skills to meet their educational goals.
- Verifies that the unique methods for delivering curricula are consistent with educational best practices and provides students with assurances that the education they are paying for is valuable and worth their time, money, and effort.
- Allows institutions to prepare students, by supporting their achievement of knowledge, skills, and abilities, to be productive individuals who contribute to their community and continue lifelong learning.

## For Institutions, DEAC Accreditation…

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

## For the Public, DEAC Accreditation…

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

## For Government and Industry Professionals, DEAC Accreditation…

- Provides an opportunity for industry professionals to offer input and observations that reflect current and future employment needs in a changing global economy.
- Demonstrates to various federal and state regulators that accredited institutions are leaders in the field of distance education and strive to prepare a workforce equipped to

contribute to the changing economic landscape.

- Provides the opportunity for member institutions to lead the change necessary in the field of education by offering students the chance to increase their knowledge and skills while meeting their personal and professional responsibilities.

## DEAC Today

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

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

## Recognition by the United States Department of Education

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

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

## Recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

CHEA was formed in 1996 by presidents of United States colleges and universities to demonstrate higher education quality through strengthened accreditation processes. It promotes academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and works to advance self-regulation in higher education through accreditation. Recognition by CHEA affirms that the standards and procedures of accrediting organizations meet the academic quality, institutional improvement, and accountability expectations CHEA has

established. DEAC first received recognition by CHEA in 2001. It received its most recent grant of recognition from CHEA in 2023 through 2030. 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[1]

## Introduction

Part Two of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) *Accreditation Handbook* is intended to set forth the procedural framework that institutions seeking accreditation from DEAC are required to follow. It also includes a description of the primary documents and information an institution will be expected to submit in order to demonstrate compliance with DEAC accreditation standards (found in Part Three of the DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*).

Please note that, although the process of evaluation for accreditation is comprehensive and thorough for both initial applicants and those institutions seeking a renewal of their accreditation, the process for a new applicant includes additional steps and requirements, including an initial assessment of "readiness."

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

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

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

### Five Important Notes on DEAC's Accreditation Processes and Procedures

1. **The decisions to apply for accreditation and to continue through the accreditation process are voluntary.** Applicant institutions for initial accreditation or reaccreditation may at any time drop out of the accreditation process, subject to their continuing obligation for the payment of any required fees and already incurred expenses.

2. **Scope of Accreditation**. DEAC only awards accreditation status for institutions. DEAC does not offer pre-accreditation or similar status nor does DEAC accredit institutions on a "partial" basis. Accredited institutions may offer distance education services that are not part of the institution's accredited degree or non-degree program curriculum. These could

[1] Revisions to Part Two as adopted by the Commission at its January 2025 meeting are effective February 24, 2025.

include, by way of example, continuing education courses, professional development courses, and courses offered in partnership with individual businesses. However, any distance education offerings of this nature must be clearly designated as outside of the scope of accreditation granted by DEAC both on the institution's website and in the description of the distance education being offered.

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

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

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

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

regulation, DEAC adheres to the more rigorous standards.

In addition, in certain areas, DEAC of its own accord, after review and comment by its members, has elected to implement disclosure and reporting requirements that exceed those required by government regulations or those required by other accrediting organizations. This is particularly the case when DEAC believes that higher levels of transparency benefit the public generally and, more particularly, enrolled and prospective students of DEAC-accredited institutions/programs.

5. **Acceptance of DEAC Bylaws and Published Policies, Procedures and Standards** Institutions that elect to seek accreditation from DEAC or have been accredited byDEAC must agree in writing to be bound by and comply with the terms of DEAC'scorporate by-laws and its published policies, standards, and procedures, including those set forth in the DEAC *Accreditation Handbook.*

## I. Accreditation Process for First Time Applicants; Initial Training

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

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

**A. Step One: Preparing for Accreditation:** A key person at the institution who will be leading or central to the accreditation application process must enroll in and successfully complete the *Preparing for DEAC Accreditation* tutorial to qualify as a person designated by the institution to manage the accreditation process and compliance with DEAC standards. The course is available through the Online Training Center on DEAC's websiteat www.deac.org. This tutorial must be completed within one year prior to submitting the application for accreditation. DEAC does not accept applications for accreditation without a copy of the Certificate of Completion for the

tutorial from the key person who completed the course.

**B. No Promotional Use of DEAC's Accreditation Process:** An initial applicant institution may not suggest that it is accredited by or will be accredited by or otherwise holds any form of approval by DEAC unless and until accreditation has been finally granted, and then solely in accordance with the rules for referencing DEAC accreditation set forth in Standard XIII.G. 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 toreceiving DEAC accreditation." If DEAC is informed that an applicant institution has violated the foregoing prohibition, the DEAC executive director will notify the institution immediately that it is to cease and desist. If the institution continues in the unauthorized promotional use, its application for accreditation will be terminated, and the institution will not be allowed to reapply for accreditation for one year.

## II. Accreditation Process for Applicants for Renewal of Accreditation

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

## III. Application for Initial Accreditation or Accreditation Renewal; Determining Eligibility

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

A determination of an applicant's eligibility by DEAC is communicated by a letter, delivered within approximately 45 days of DEAC's receipt of the completed application. All

documentation must be accurate and included, and payment must be rendered before DEAC will begin its review. That letter marks the start of the formal evaluation of an applicant institution for accreditation. If an initial applicant institution is determined to be ineligible, DEAC will communicate this decision within the same time frame and will provide the basis for its decision. Institutions whose applications have not been accepted may reapply only after they have resolved the disqualifying issue(s) to the satisfaction of DEAC. If an applicant for reaccreditation is determined to be ineligible, the Commission will initiate an inquiry into the noncompliance and, when appropriate, will issue a show cause directive or take other action pursuant to the terms of Section XVII (Interim Monitoring). Institutions that elect to proceed with their application for accreditation must complete all steps of the accreditation process within 18 to 24 months after the determination of eligibility is communicated by DEAC.

The eligibility criteria are as follows:

**A.** A distance education institution or provider is defined by DEAC as an educational institution or organization whose primary purpose is providing education or training that:

1. formally enrolls students and maintains student records;
2. retains qualified faculty to service students;
3. provides educationally sound and up-to-date curricula that are supported by quality instructional materials and appropriate technology; and
4. provides continuous two-way communication on student work, e.g., evaluating students' examinations, projects, and/or answering queries, with timely feedback given to students.

Furthermore,

5. each program offered by the institution is predominantly distance education or correspondence education (51 percent or more);
6. the institution offers non-degree and/or degree programs up to the professional doctoral level pursuant to DEAC's scope of recognition; and
7. the institution uses the term "college" or "university" in its name only if it offers academic degree programs.

**B.** The institution is properly licensed, authorized, exempted, or approved by all applicable state education institutional authorities (or their equivalent for non-U.S. institutions). The institution is in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements. Exemptions from state law must be supported by state-issued documentation or by express statutory/regulatory language. As applicable, proper authorization in an institution's state of domicile is a prerequisite for DEAC accreditation and is required to maintain accredited status. Accordingly, should an institution lose its state licensure in its state of domicile for any reason while applying for initial accreditation or reaccreditation, the accreditation process is automatically terminated. In any such situation, the institution shall not be entitled to receive any refund of fees already paid

to DEAC nor shall DEAC have any liability to the institution associated with the termination of the application/evaluation process. DEAC accreditation of an accredited institution is also automatically withdrawn as of the date of the loss of state licensure. Such a withdrawal of accreditation may be appealed by an institution pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section XII below.

**C.** At the time of the initial application, the institution has been enrolling students in the current programs for 12 consecutive months. The institution may not add new programs during this 12-month period leading up to the submission of the application or during the initial accreditation process. In its response to this criterion, the institution must submit a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the names, mailing addresses, and email addresses of no more than the first 100 students consecutively enrolled within each division and degree level of the institution, beginning the first day of the twelfth month preceding the date of this application. If the institution has less than 100 students, it should submit the information for all students enrolled. Only institutions whose programs are offered 100 percent by correspondence may submit the names and addresses of students on self-adhesive mailing labels.

**D.** At the time of initial application, the institution has been operating under the current legal status, form of control, and ownership for two consecutive years. The institution may not undergo changes in current legal status, form of control, or ownership during the initial accreditation process.

**E.** The institution has clearly articulated outcomes for its educational offerings and has an ongoing outcomes assessment program in place designed to measure student achievement and satisfaction.

**F.** The institution maintains a permanent physical facility that supports its educational offerings and business operations in a professional setting. The facility is maintained at a fixed geographic location that is appropriately licensed, authorized, or approved, as required by applicable regulatory authorities and as required by DEAC standards. A Post Office box is <u>not</u> a physical facility address.

**G.** The institution documents that it is financially sound and can meet its financial obligations to provide instruction and service to its students by submitting financial statements in accordance with Part Three, Section XIV, Finance, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook.*

**H.** The institution demonstrates that its name is free from any association with any activity that could damage the standing of DEAC or of the accrediting process, such as illegal actions, unethical conduct, or abuse of consumers.

**I.** The institution and the institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations and show a record of integrity and ethical

conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators have records free from any association with any malfeasance, including, but not limited to, owning, managing, or controlling any educational institutions that have entered bankruptcy or have closed, to the detriment of the students. Ongoing governmental actions such as indictments, law enforcement activities, or censure in any applicable jurisdiction against an institution, an institution's owners, governing board members, officials, or administrators must be promptly disclosed by an institution to DEAC regardless of whether initiated before or during the period in which an institution is applying for accreditation or reaccreditation and during any period during which an institution is accredited by DEAC (Standard II.B). The notice should include an explanation from the institution as to the circumstances giving rise to the governmental action and why the governmental action should not result in a declaration of ineligibility under this section and/or a violation of Standard II. Upon receipt of the notice, the Commission may, in its sole discretion, undertake a review and/or make a determination that the governmental action places the institution in violation of this eligibility criterion and of Standard II.

**J.** The institution agrees that, as part of the application process, its ownership may be subject to a legal structure review. Further, its owners, officers, and managers may be subject to background checks by DEAC, which may include, but not be limited to, DEAC surveys of governmental agencies including national agencies, federal departments, state educational oversight agencies, and consumer protection agencies, and checks on their credit history, prior bankruptcy, criminal background, debarment from federal student aid or other federal programs, the closing of educational institutions in which they were owners, managers or principals, or the loss of accreditation or governmental, including federal and state approval to operate an educational institution. The costs of such background checks will be borne by the applicant.

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

## IV. Self-Evaluation and Readiness Assessment (First Time Applicants ONLY)

For initial applicants, the next step after receipt of DEAC's application acceptance letter is a readiness assessment conducted by an independent DEAC-appointed evaluator. The readiness assessment provides a preliminary evaluation of the institution. It is not a comprehensive examination nor should a finding of "ready" by the evaluator be construed as an indication that an institution is likely to be granted accreditation if it proceeds with the more extensive accreditation evaluation. Rather, it is intended to determine whether or not the institution has sufficient strength and stability to competently undertake a full

evaluation, and therefore whether a commitment of the institution's and DEAC's resources in administering such an evaluation is merited. The assessment also provides guidance to the institution on the actions necessary for the institution to prepare for the more in-depth, rigorous, and comprehensive review. **A determination of Not-Ready by an independent evaluator or the on-site team is final and not subject to appeal or to review by the Commission.**

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

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

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

**B.** The Readiness Assessment Report is returned to the institution within 12-15 weeks following DEAC's receipt of the institution's SER. The institution is either "Deemed Ready" or "Deemed Not Ready".

- **Deemed Ready:** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating that it is

deemed ready to continue the accreditation process. The letter also provides guidance to the institution on where its operations and SER responses need to be strengthened, expanded, or revised in order to increase the likelihood of a successful accreditation evaluation and on-site visit. The letter contains an overview of the accreditation process, provides information on next steps, and indicates that the DEAC director of accreditation will coordinate with the institution to schedule the dates for the on-site evaluation. Institutions that are deemed ready must submit their curricula for review within three months. (see Section V below). The institution must also submit its revised SER to the on-site evaluation team at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit.

- **Deemed Not Ready (Second Submission):** The institution receives a letter from DEAC indicating that it is not deemed ready to continue the accreditation process. The institution has six months to submit a complete updated SER including all supporting exhibits taking into account the evaluator's comments and incorporating any recommendations, together with a nonrefundable second submission readiness fee (see DEAC website for fee schedule). If, based on the revised SER, the independent DEAC-appointed evaluator deems the institution ready to continue the accreditation process, the institution will begin the curricular review process (see Section V below) required for the full evaluation by submitting its curricula for review within three months. The institution must also submit a revised SER to the on-site evaluation team at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit.

- **Deemed Not Ready (Third Submission):** If the institution is not deemed ready after the second submission, the institution has another six months to revise and submit a new SER incorporating the evaluator's comments and recommendations. The third submission is reviewed and evaluated by an independent readiness assessment evaluator appointed by DEAC, who makes a readiness assessment based on the revised SER and the results of the virtual readiness assessment. A determination that the institution is not ready is final; however, the institution can reapply for initial accreditation after one year. The third submission must be accompanied by the nonrefundable applicable virtual visit fee (see DEAC website for fee schedule).

## V. Full Accreditation Evaluation Process

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

### A. Curricular Review

As a part of the accreditation process, DEAC engages subject matter specialists to conduct comprehensive evaluations of course/program materials. The subject matter specialist is responsible for ascertaining whether the curricula and materials offered by the distance education institution are complete, accurate, and are up to date and

aligned with stated educational outcomes. While only representative courses are reviewed in depth, the subsequent on-site review includes the scope and sequence of all curricula. Course materials submitted as part of an institution's application for accreditation are not returned to the institution. The institution is invoiced for each course/program review. Curricular reviews associated with full accreditation evaluations typically take between two and three months.

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

**B. Curricular Review for Institutions Seeking Initial Accreditation**

Once the applicant institution is deemed "ready" to move forward in the accreditation process, DEAC selects the programs from the institution's Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) submitted with its application for accreditation. DEAC sends a memo with the course/program selections and instructions for the curricular review.

1. **Degree Program Selections**
   a. For each degree program offered, DEAC selects approximately 50 percent of the courses for review. Courses are selected based on a broad and fair representation of the curriculum for each degree program.

   b. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and curriculum materials for each program as directed by DEAC staff, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

   c. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

2. **Non-Degree Program Selections**
   a. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and the curriculum materials as directed by DEAC staff, including supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

   b. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

3. **High School Program Selections**
   a. For each high school program offered, approximately 50 percent of the courses are selected for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criterion:

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

b. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and the curriculum materials as directed by DEAC staff, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

c. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

4. **Response to the Subject Specialist Review**
   All institutions that undergo the curricular review process for initial accreditation must respond to any "Partially Meets" or "Does Not Meet" findings prior to the on-site evaluation. The institutional response is sent to DEAC and is shared with the DEAC on-site evaluation team.

**C. Curricular Review for Institutions Seeking Renewal of Accreditation**

After the institution's application for renewal of accreditation has been accepted, DEAC selects the programs from the institution's Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI). DEAC sends a memo with the course/program selections and instructions for the curricular review.

1. **Degree Program Selections**
   a. The representative programs and courses are selected based on the following criteria:

      - If one program is offered, DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the institution's courses for review. The selection will include the final or capstone course.

      - If between two and 10 programs are offered, DEAC will select approximately 50 percent of the programs, and approximately 25 percent of the courses for review per program. The selection will include the capstone/final program course.

      - If more than 11 programs are offered, DEAC will select approximately seven programs or 25 percent of the programs (whichever is greater), and approximately 25 percent of the courses for review per program. The selection will include the capstone/final program course.

   b. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and curriculum materials as directed by DEAC staff, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review by off-site subject specialists.

c. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

2. **Non-Degree Program Selections**
   a. The representative educational offerings are selected based on the following criterion:

   b. Approximately 25 percent of all non-degree educational offerings that are broadly representative.

   c. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and the curriculum materials for each selected educational offering as directed by DEAC staff, including supporting documentation, for review off-site by subject specialists.

   d. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

3. **High School Program Selections**
   a. For each high school program offered, DEAC will select approximately 25 percent of the courses for review. The representative courses are selected based on the following criterion:

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

   b. The institution submits the corresponding educational offerings report and the curriculum materials as directed by DEAC staff, including identified courses with supporting documentation, for review off site by subject specialists.

   c. The institution receives an invoice for the curricular review upon receipt of the materials.

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 shared with the DEAC on-site evaluation team.

**D. Self-Evaluation Report for Full Accreditation Evaluation**

All applicants for accreditation must submit a completed SER as part of the evaluation process. For institutions applying for accreditation for the first time, the SER is typically a revision of the SER submitted in connection with the readiness assessment, expanded and updated based on the applicant's experience of going through the assessment and receiving feedback from the DEAC evaluator. The SER must be submitted to DEAC at

least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site visit and is shared with the on-site evaluation team. The SER for the full evaluation follows the same form as the SER required for the readiness assessment (see Section VI.A. above and DEAC website for the SER form and Guide to Self- Evaluation). However, institutions submitting SERs in connection with the full evaluation process must demonstrate that they are in compliance with all DEAC accreditation standards (see Part Three of DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). Partial compliance is not sufficient to be awarded accreditation.

## VI. Petitions and Waivers

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

The Commission shall review a properly submitted petition, including its supporting documentation, and shall vote to either approve or deny the petition.

1. The Commission will grant a waiver or alternative interpretation of its standards or procedures where an institution is able to demonstrate, as determined by the Commission in its reasonable discretion, that:

   - extenuating circumstances are present that indicate that the normal application of the standard or procedure would create an undue hardship on the institution or its students, or

   - the waiver or alternative interpretation meets the underlying purpose and intent of the standard or procedure.

2. If a petition is denied, the institution may not resubmit a petition for the samerequest unless a subsequent change in relevant facts and circumstances or other material development would be likely to result in a different decision by the Commission. Petitions are granted for a period of one year for initial applicants and one accreditation cycle for accredited institutions.

3. DEAC notifies the institution in writing of its decision within 30 days following that decision. Such notice includes a summary of the rationale for the Commission's decision. A decision by the Commission not to grant a waiver or alternative interpretation is final and is not subject to appeal.

## VII. Consideration of Third-Party Information

**A.** DEAC publishes notice of the institutions under review for initial or renewal of accreditation on its website and encourages interested parties to submit written comments pertaining to such review. DEAC also solicits comments from third parties, such as governmental or quasi-governmental entities, U.S. federal and state educational agencies, other accrediting or licensing organizations. DEAC may also solicit comments from education-focused media, industry groups, and other relevant parties. Comments may be submitted via DEAC's website or by mail or other delivery method.

**B.** DEAC requests that public and third-party comments are submitted at least 30 days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Commission at which the institution's application for accreditation or reaccreditation is to be evaluated. This timeframe allows for a reasonable period for DEAC to share the comment with the institution and for the institution to respond to the same. Comments received after the deadline will be provided to the Commission, together with such additional information relating to the comment as DEAC may have gathered. To the extent that the Commission believes that the comment raises a serious and credible concern with respect to the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards which are not addressed by the institution's SER, the Chair's Report, and the institution's response to the Chair's Report, the Commission will determine whether the issuance of a deferral notice or a show cause directive is appropriate.

**C.** Any information received from the public is provided to the institution for review and response. A copy of the public comment and the institution's response to the same, if any, are included in the record to be reviewed by the Commission. Information received from government agencies or departments is treated in the same way as information obtained from nongovernmental sources unless the agency or department provides the information to DEAC with express requirements of confidentiality.

**D.** With respect to applicants for reaccreditation, the Commission also takes into account actions by other accrediting organizations that have denied accreditation or renewal of accreditation status to the institution, have placed the institution on probation, or have been denied renewal of accreditation or withdrawn/revoked the accreditation status of the institution. For initial applicants, any of the foregoing may be a barrier to establishing eligibility for DEAC accreditation.

## VIII. On-Site Evaluation

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

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

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

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

- a Chair,
- an education standards evaluator,
- a business standards evaluator,
- a subject specialist for each subject area,
- a DEAC staff member, and
- a governmental, accreditation agency or U.S. state or federal agency or department observer(s) (invited).

One person may serve in more than one of the above roles; however, all such roles will be represented on the on-site team. On-site teams working in other contexts, such as reviews in connection with substantive changes (see Section XVIII below) are generally smaller and tailored to the specific substantive change under review. Once the evaluators are selected, their names are submitted to the institution. The institution may object, with an adequate reason, to a specific evaluator and request that another evaluator be chosen. DEAC considers any objections submitted by an institution but is not required to replace evaluators to whom objections have been made.

**B. On-Site Evaluation Function and Process:** The on-site evaluation provides an opportunity for evaluators to meet with key staff members, faculty/instructors, principal managers, outside accountants, governing board members, and advisory council members in order to verify that the institution is meeting its mission, can demonstrate successful student achievement, and otherwise operates in accordance with DEAC accreditation standards. All such institutional personnel must be present or readily available by telephone or other method during the on-site visit.

1. Before the on-site evaluation, each evaluator develops a comprehensive impression of the institution's operations by completing a thorough review of the SER and then answers questions on the evaluation form provided by DEAC.

2. The Chair of the on-site team is responsible for the completion of the on-site evaluation in accordance with DEAC's processes and procedures and ensures that each evaluator completes his/her tasks during the on-site evaluation.

3. A DEAC staff member accompanies the on-site team throughout the on-site evaluation to ensure objectivity, impartiality, uniformity, consistency in the interpretation of standards, and adherence to established procedures and to serve as a liaison between the on-site team and the Commission.

**C. Chair's Report:** The culmination of the on-site visit is the Chair's Report. This document is created by the chair of the on-site team and sets forth the team's findings on the compliance of the institution with each accreditation standard. The Chair's Report is provided to DEAC, which reviews the report for completeness and clarity before forwarding it to the institution for response, typically within eight weeks following the conclusion of the on- site visit. The institution's response is due within 30 days following its receipt of the report.

In its response, the institution may add new or supporting information or correct any incorrect statements made in the Chair's Report. Both the Chair's Report and the institution's response are submitted to the Commission, together with other evaluation materials, including the SER, subject matter specialist reports, and third-party comments (if any) and the institution's response to the same (if any). The Commission will review all documents prior to making a decision on the institution's application. In the event that, following the on-site visit but prior to the Commission's making its decision on the accreditation of an applicant institution, the institution undergoes a material change in its management, method of operation, enrollment, or program offerings, or has any reason to believe it is no longer in compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards, the institution must promptly notify DEAC in writing and include such details as are available so that the Commission can consider the information in the review of the institution's application.

## IX. Commission Actions on Initial and Renewal of Accreditation

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

institution and the DEAC relating to the accreditation process, and other relevant documentation that may be submitted or created by the institution, DEAC or the public in connection with the evaluation process.

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

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

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

**A. Accredit** a new applicant institution for up to three years or renew an institution's accredited status for up to five years. In either case, the Commission may, in its discretion, also require that the institution submit interim reports on specific programs or services at different points during the institution's accreditation term. These reports are separate and apart from the interim annual reporting requirements of all DEAC-accredited institutions.

1. If an institution complies in all material respects with DEAC's accreditation standards but the Commission has identified minor administrative or clerical deficiencies in the institution's documentation or operations that can be easily corrected by the institution and those corrections can be confirmed remotely by DEAC staff, then the Commission may vote to grant accreditation or the renewal of accreditation to such institution contingent on written confirmation of the correction(s) by DEAC's executive director. In such event, the staff will notify the institution of the deficiencies to be corrected and the deadline for making the corrections. If a deficiency continues beyond the stated deadline, or if the Commission's staff is unable to confirm the needed correction(s) the accreditation decision with respect to such institution will be referred to the Commission's next scheduled semiannual meeting.

**B. Defer** a decision pending the Commission's receipt of additional information requested in the deferral notice. A deferral notice is issued in order for the institution to provide additional information and/or supplement its response with respect to concerns of the Commission, in each case as set forth in the deferral notice. A deferral notice does not

represent a determination of non-compliance. The maximum deferral period is 12 months from the date of the Commission's decision unless the Commission extends the period for "good cause" as defined below. In no event will the deferral period, including any good cause extensions, extend beyond the shorter of 24 months or 150 percent of the length of the institution's longest program.

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

    a. identify the accreditation standards for which the Commission requires additional information, reports, on-site evaluations, and/or performance data in order to fully evaluate the institution's compliance;

    b. provide the time frames within which such additional requirements must be completed and a description of the additional information and materials to be provided; and

    c. inform the institution of the month in which its application for accreditation or renewal of accreditation will next be reviewed by the Commission.

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

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

    a. grant accreditation or renewal of accreditation if it determines that the institution's response demonstrates that the institution is compliant with the noted accreditation standards and requirements;

    b. extend the deferral period if appropriate;

    c. issue a show cause directive in accordance with the procedures set forth below; or

    d. deny accreditation or reaccreditation as set forth below.

3. **Status During Deferral Period:** An accredited institution under a deferral notice will retain its accreditation status unless and until the Commission decides to deny or withdraw its accreditation, as applicable. Notice of the deferral will be published on DEAC's website.

**C.** In cases where the Commission does not believe that an institution has demonstrated compliance with accreditation standards and other requirements, the Commission will direct the institution to **Show Cause** as to why its application for accreditation or reaccreditation should not be denied or revoked.

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

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

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

**Show Cause Remediation Period:** The maximum Show Cause Remediation Period may not exceed the shorter of (a) two years, or (b) 150 percent of the length of the institution's longest program (unless the Commission extends the period for "good cause" as defined below). The burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate, within the Show Cause Remediation Period (as that may be extended for good cause shown) and consistent with the terms of the show cause directive, that it is meeting

DEAC's accreditation standards. In no event will a Show Cause Remediation Period, including any good cause extensions which may be granted, exceed three years.

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

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

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

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

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

2. If the Commission initiates an adverse action to deny an institution's application for renewal of its accreditation, the institution will retain its accredited status unless

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

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

## X. Actions Available to Commission During an Accreditation Term

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

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

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

The procedure for special visits is as follows:

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

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

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

**B. Mid-Term Show Cause Directive.** A show cause directive may be issued by the Commission to an accredited institution which the Commission has reason to believe is no longer in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards during an accreditation term. In this event, the institution is directed to show cause why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. The mid-term issuance of a show cause directive shall follow the same terms as are set forth in Section IX.C. above. However, the decision by the Commission at the end of the Show Cause Period is whether or not to withdraw the institution's accreditation, extend the Show Cause Period for good cause, or vacate the show cause directive if warranted by remedial actions implemented by the institution.

**C.** If a DEAC member institution is the subject of an adverse action or negative change in accreditation status by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized accrediting agency, the Commission shall promptly review the institution's compliance with the relevant DEAC accreditation standards to determine if DEAC should also initiate an adverse action, issue a show cause directive or initiate such further investigation of the institution as it deems proper.

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

## XI. Definitions Relating to Commission Actions

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

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

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

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

**B. Definition of Final Decision:** A decision by the Commission to grant accreditation or reaccreditation to an institution is final as of the date on which the Commission votes for such a grant. A decision by the Commission to take adverse action is initiated by a vote of the Commission but does not become final until such time as the institution's right of appeal is exhausted or waived. Decisions taken by the Commission during an institution's term of accreditation that do not initiate adverse action (such as decisions to order a special visit or issue a show cause directive) are final when taken but are not subject to appeal except for decisions to deny a substantive change. An institution may only appeal (1) decisions not to approve a substantive change and (2) decisions by the Commission to initiate an adverse action.

**C. Record:** The term "Record" refers to the body of materials submitted to the Commission and on which the Commission bases its review and decisions. In the context of applications for accreditation or reaccreditation, the Record typically consists of the

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

## XII. Appealing a Commission's Adverse Decision

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

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

**A. Nature of Appeals Process:**

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

**B. Appeal Process:**

1. **Application for Appeal:** An institution appealing an appealable decision by the Commission must submit the Application for Appeal form (available from DEAC's

website) together with the applicable appeals fee (see fees page on DEAC website) to the executive director of DEAC within 10 days of the receipt of DEAC's letter advising the institution of the decision that is being appealed. The application for appeal shall state generally the basis on which the appeal is being made. An institution's failure to submit the application for appeal and associated fee within the 10-day period will waive its right of appeal, and the Commission's decision will automatically become final.

2. **Statement of Appeal:** An institution which has timely filed an application for appeal must then submit a written statement setting forth the reasons the institution believes that the Commission's decision was in clear error, referring to the part(s) of the Record that support its positions. The institution may provide alternative bases for a determination of error, but evidence in support of each basis is limited to the materials and information included in the Record; no evidence or information not included in the Record will be considered by the appeals panel. The institution's statement must be delivered to the DEAC executive director within thirty (30) days of the institution's receiving notification of the decision being appealed.

3. **Burden of Proof:** The institution has the burden to show that the Commission's decision resulted from errors or omissions in the execution of DEAC's policies and procedures or that the decision was not based on substantial evidence in the Record. One or more specific procedural errors or unsupported findings by the Commission will not result in a remand if the balance of the Record independently supports the decision taken by the Commission. No new materials may be presented for the appeals panel's consideration on appeal.

4. **DEAC Response:** DEAC may, in its discretion, submit a written response to the appellant's statement within 30 days following its receipt of the appellant institution's statement.

5. **Request for Oral Argument:** In its written statement, the appellant institution must state whether or not it wants the appeals panel to hear oral argument. The names and affiliations of those appearing to make the oral presentation should be included with the request when available; if not available at the time of the request, and in the absence of extenuating circumstances justifying a later disclosure, the institution shall provide the names of those appearing no later than seven days prior to the scheduled hearing date. If the appellant institution does not request oral argument, then the appeals panel will make its decision based on the Record, the Commission's written findings and reasons related to the decision being appealed, the appellant's statement, and DEAC's response to that statement (if any) (the "Record for Appeal").

6. **Materials Provided to the Appeals Panel:** DEAC is responsible for providing to the appeals panel, within 45 days following the appellant institution's submission of its statement, a copy of the Record for Appeal. A copy of DEAC's response (if any) will

be provided to the institution on the same date.

**C. Hearing Procedure:**

1. A hearing before the appeals panel shall be scheduled within 60 days following the delivery of the Record for Appeal to appeals panel members. The hearing will be held virtually unless the appeals panel determines, in its sole discretion, that the physical presence of the panel and the parties is reasonably required. The appellant institution shall have 30 minutes in which to argue its case in front of the appeals panel. The 30 minutes does not include the time attributable to questions from the appeals panel and the institution's response to the questions. The time period may also be extended by the appeals panel in its discretion. Oral argument by the institution may not include arguments not previously made in its statement. DEAC shall have at least one representative present at the hearing. The DEAC representative shall participate in the proceeding solely for the purpose of correcting errors or misleading statements made in the process. The institution shall have the opportunity to respond to any such correction by indicating the part(s) of the Record supporting the perceived error or misleading statement. Depending on the nature of the hearing (e.g., whether virtual or not), DEAC will indicate to the appeals panel its interest in speaking and the appeals panel will afford it an opportunity to do so in its discretion. Any DEAC correction and institutional response shall not be included within the 30-minute time limitation.

2. The appeal hearing will be recorded by stenographic or electronic means, and a copy of the same will be provided to the institution upon request.

3. The appeals panel will render its decision within 30 days following the hearing date, if a hearing is held, or within 30 days following the submission of the Record for Appeal if no hearing is requested. The decision shall provide a summary of the appeals panel rationale for its decision. The decision will be delivered to the DEAC executive director, who shall provide it to the Commission and the institution within one business day.

**D. Appeals Panel:**

1. The institution's appeal is heard by an independent appeals panel that does not include DEAC staff or members of the Commission and serves as an additional level of due process for the institution. It can affirm, amend, or remand the prior decision of the Commission as set forth below.

2. The appeals panel does not have authority to evaluate or rule on the reasonableness of eligibility criteria, procedures, or accreditation standards. Its role is to determine whether the Commission's action was clearly erroneous in that it was not supported by any reasonable evaluation of the Record and/or attributable to a material error in applying DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures.

3. The appeals panel consists of three people appointed by DEAC: a public member, an academic, and an administrator. Potential members of an appeals panel are selected by DEAC's executive director from the ranks of former members of the Commission, the corps of DEAC evaluators, and active staff of DEAC-accredited institutions who have completed DEAC's evaluator training program. In order to ensure a prompt hearing of appeals, DEAC maintains a pool of potential appeals panel candidates who have agreed to serve if requested. These candidates receive annual training on DEAC's accreditation standards, evaluation processes and procedures, conflict of interest policy, and the appeals panel process, scope, and responsibility.

4. Candidates selected for the appeals panel must possess knowledge of DEAC's accreditation mission, standards, and procedures. The candidates cannot include any current member of the Commission or any person involved in an evaluation of the appellant institution completed within the previous five years and cannot have a conflict of interest as defined in DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy (see Part Four of DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). The executive director submits a list of proposed appeals panel members to the appellant institution. Within 10 calendar days of receiving the list of proposed panel members, the appellant institution may request, in writing, that any person or persons be removed from the list on the basis of potential conflict of interest as defined in DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy. If DEAC determines that the request is reasonable, the candidate will be replaced.

**E. Decisions Available to the Appeals Panel:**

1. **Affirm:** If the appeals panel determines that the institution has failed to meet its burden of proof in showing that the Commission's action was not supported by the record or was attributable to a material error in its application of DEAC's published policies and procedures, it must affirm the decision of the Commission.

2. **Remand:** The appeals panel may remand a decision to the Commission for reconsideration when it finds that the Record on Appeal (and, as applicable, the hearing transcript) did not support the Commission's decision. In its decision to remand, the appeals panel must identify those material facts that it finds the Commission failed to consider or where the Commission otherwise committed one or more material errors in its deliberations and decision-making process. The Commission must act in a manner consistent with the appeals panel's decisions and/or instructions.

3. **Affirm and Amend:** If the appeals panel determines that, although it agrees with the Commission's decision based on the entirety of the Record for Appeal, one or more elements of the Commission's stated reasoning or procedural actions was nevertheless clearly in error, the appeals panel may amend the decision. An appeals panel decision to amend a Commission decision remands the matter to the Commission in order that the Commission modify the bases for its decision in accordance with the specific direction of the appeals panel.

4. **Communication of Decision:** The appeals panel will communicate its decision to DEAC in a written report setting forth the basis for its decision. DEAC will then notify the institution of the decision in writing.

**F. DEAC Receipt and Implementation of Appeals Panel Decisions:**
If the Commission's decision to initiate an adverse action or to deny a request for substantive change is upheld by the appeals panel in its original or in an amended form,

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

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

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

## XIII. Arbitration

DEAC complies with the arbitration requirements of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended ("HEA") at Section 496(e), 20 U.S.C. § 1099b(e). Under this provision, the Secretary does not recognize the accreditation of an institution unless the institution agrees to submit any dispute involving an adverse action[2] to arbitration before initiating any other legal action. DEAC has established this process for initial arbitration pursuant to the

[2] An adverse action is the denial or withdrawal of accreditation or the denial of a substantive change, appeal rights exhausted.

requirements of 34 C.F.R. § 602.20(e) and the due process considerations of 34 C.F.R. § 602.25.

If an institution disputes the Commission's initiation of an adverse action or a Commission decision not to approve a substantive change beyond the appeals process administered by DEAC, it may elect to submit the dispute to initial non-binding arbitration.

To initiate such arbitration, the institution must submit to DEAC a request for a review by an independent Arbitrator within five business days of its receipt of written notice from the Commission of its decision (after the appeal has been exhausted) together with the applicable non-refundable arbitration fee (see DEAC website for arbitration fee). The Commission's adverse decision will be stayed upon receipt of the institution's request for review and the institution's accreditation will remain in place until the final outcome of the arbitration proceeding is determined. Arbitration shall be conducted under the auspices of the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be initiated by the institution with the AAA within 30 days following the institution's receipt of notice that the adverse action taken by the Commission has become final. The sole and exclusive venue for the arbitration shall be the District of Columbia.

Arbitration under this section shall be conducted by a single arbitrator who must have familiarity and experience with the field of higher education and the federal rules governing accrediting organizations. The AAA will provide a list of qualified arbitrator candidates. The institution and DEAC will use good faith efforts to select an arbitrator from the AAA list; if they are unable to do so, the AAA will select the arbitrator. Arbitrator candidates will be subject to DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and is not a decision maker of DEAC.

The question(s) to be resolved by the arbitrator are limited to whether the Commission's decision was clearly erroneous because it was (a) not reasonably supported by the Record for Appeal and/or (b) solely attributable to a misapplication of DEAC's accreditation standards or published policies and procedures. The fact that the Record considered by the Commission could have also supported a different decision is not sufficient grounds for an arbitrator to remand the decision if the Commission's actual decision is also supported by the Record.

The arbitration shall be held within ninety days following the submission of the Record of Appeal to the Arbitrator. The date for the hearing shall be determined by the Arbitrator in their discretion but may be revised by the Arbitrator in their discretion in response to a request for change from either party. The institution may submit a brief of no longer than 20 pages at least 30 days prior to the hearing date. DEAC may respond to the institution's brief with a brief of no more than 20 pages. No discovery shall be authorized nor may evidence in addition to that in the Record for Appeal be introduced in either party's briefs or oral argument. At the arbitration hearing, each party shall be entitled to 30 minutes of oral argument. The parties may reserve up to five minutes for use in a closing statement. The remainder of the hearing will be reserved for questions from the Arbitrator. A

transcript of the hearing shall be made and provided in electronic form to the Arbitrator and each of the parties. The Arbitrator shall make a decision based on the Record for Appeal, the briefs of the parties, and the arbitration hearing (the "Arbitral Record").

The Arbitrator may affirm, affirm in an amended form, or remand the Commission decision at issue. The decision of the Arbitrator shall include a summary of the reasoning supporting the decision and shall be delivered to the institution and DEAC within 30 days following the Arbitration hearing. If the decision of the Arbitrator is to affirm or amend and affirm the Commission's decision, it may be reviewed by the federal courts. If the decision of the Arbitrator is to remand the adverse decision to the Commission, the Commission will consider the remand at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting called for this specific purpose. The institution will be informed of the Commission's decision on remand within 30 days of its consideration.

The arbitration proceedings, arbitration filings and Record shall be treated as confidential by the parties except as may be required to enforce their respective rights. The arbitrator's decision shall not be deemed confidential.

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

## XIV. Record Keeping and Confidentiality

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

1. its last full accreditation reviews of each institution, including the application, on-site evaluation team reports, the institution's responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted between regular reviews, and a copy of the institution's most recent Self-Evaluation Report;

2. all decisions made throughout each institution's affiliation with DEAC regarding its accreditation and any substantive change, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions;

3. all materials associated with any appeal or arbitration that may be initiated by an institution; and

4. minutes of all Board of Directors and Commission meetings.

**B. Confidentiality of Records:**

1. **Institution's Obligations with Respect to Information Related to a Commission Action or Proceeding:** Reports, evaluations (including curriculum evaluations), internal rubrics, analyses, third-party comments (whether or not solicited and

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

a. as required in connection with federal or state regulatory proceedings or pursuant to judicial process;

b. in the context of any appeals panel or arbitration proceeding pursued by an institution, provided that such disclosures shall be made under provisions of confidentiality equivalent to or more stringent than those set forth in this paragraph;

c. to the extent consisting solely of third-party materials, if such materials have also been made available to the public by such third parties; and

d. to the extent reasonably required by an institution's governing body and professional advisors, provided that any such persons or entities to whom information is disclosed are bound by written agreement or professional code of ethics not to further disclose the information.

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

2. **DEAC's Obligations with Respect to Information Provided by Institutions:** DEAC does not disclose information provided by an institution in connection with DEAC accreditation evaluations or other matters specific to that institution except

a. to the extent that such information is made generally available to the public by the institution or another third party;

b. as provided under DEAC's then-current policies and procedures including, without limitation, those set forth in the DEAC *Accreditation Handbook;*

c. when requested, required, or directed by a state or federal government entity or regulation, law enforcement entity, judicial or administrative process, or a state, federal, or industry accrediting or licensing body;

d. in connection with legal requirements or proceedings, whether or not DEAC is a direct party to such proceedings; and

e. in situations where, in DEAC's reasonable discretion, the Commission determines that disclosure is appropriate to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process and/or agency.

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

## XV. Notification and Information Sharing by DEAC

**A. Initial and Renewal of Accreditation:** DEAC provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes its decision to grant accreditation or accreditation renewal.

**B. Action Notwithstanding Third-Party Action:** If DEAC grants initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation to an institution notwithstanding the threatened interim or final adverse or negative actions taken against the institution by another recognized accrediting agency or state agency, DEAC will provide the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, within 30 days of its action, a thorough explanation of why the previous action by the accrediting agency or state does not preclude DEAC's action.

**C. Denial or Withdrawal of Accreditation:** DEAC provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate accrediting organizations and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission initiates an action to deny or withdraw accreditation to an institution. DEAC requires the institution to disclose the initiation of an adverse action to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the Commission's decision. Such notice must, at minimum, meet the requirements of Section XVI.A.3. below.

If the initiated adverse action becomes final following the exhaustion or waiver of the institution's right of appeal, DEAC will again provide written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, the appropriate

accrediting organizations and the public (through DEAC's website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the adverse action becomes final. DEAC also requires the institution to disclose that the adverse action had become final and that the institution is no longer accredited by DEAC to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the final adverse decision and consistent with the requirements of Section XVI.A.3 below.

**D. Notice of Deferral:** DEAC publishes a notice of deferral on its website within 30 days after the Commission makes a decision to defer a decision on an institution'sapplication for accreditation renewal.

**E. Show Cause Directive:** DEAC provides written notice of the Commission's issuance of a Show Cause Directive to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agencies, and the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public (through the DEAC website) at the same time it notifies the institution of the decision, but no later than 30 days after the Commission makes a decision to place an institution on Show Cause. DEAC requires the institution that is subject to the show cause directive to disclose the action to all current and prospective students within seven business days of receipt of the written notice of the show cause order. Such notice must, at minimum, meet the requirements of Section XVI.A.2. below.

**F. Public Notice:** DEAC publishes on its website, including on its directory of institutions page, notice of any of the decisions listed above within thirty days of the Commission's decision. The notice provides a summary of the reasons for the decision and the date, if any, on which the institution is next subject to a review.

**G. Additional Information Regarding Adverse Actions:** Within 60 days after a Commission decision to deny or withdraw accreditation becomes final, DEAC makes available to the U.S. Secretary of Education, the appropriate state licensing agencies,the appropriate accrediting organizations, and the public a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the Commission's decision and the official comments, if any, that the affected institution makes regarding such decision. If no official comments by the institution are provided within 14 days of notification, DEAC will document that the affected institution was offered the opportunity to provide an officialcomment.

**H. Resigning or Voluntarily Withdrawing Accreditation:** Within 10 business days of receiving notification from an institution of its decision to resign or voluntarily withdraw from DEAC accreditation, DEAC posts a notice of the institution's resignation or voluntary withdrawal of accreditation on its website and provides written notice tothe U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state licensing agencies or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting organizations.

**I. Accreditation Lapses:** If an institution elects not to renew its accreditation, DEAC posts notice on its website within 10 business days of the date upon which the institution's

accreditation lapses and provides written notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state licensing agencies or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting organizations.

**J. Potential Institutional Malfeasance:** DEAC submits to the U.S. Secretary of Education the name of any institution it accredits that DEAC has reason to believe is failing to meet its FSA Title IV responsibilities or is engaging in fraud, abuse, or other unethical conduct along with DEAC's reasons for concern about the institution's activities. In addition, DEAC informs the U.S. Secretary of Education whenever it finds significant or systemic deficiencies in the institution's assignment of credit hours.

**K. Scope of Public Information:** DEAC will make available to the public and in certain official DEAC publications, including its website and published *DEAC Directory of Accredited Institutions*, the following information:

- the name, address, phone number, and website address of an accredited institution;
- the month and year accredited and month and year for accreditation renewal;
- a summary list of programs offered by the institution;
- a summary of information pertaining to a deferral of accreditation;
- a summary of information pertaining to a show cause directive;
- a summary of information pertaining to an initiated or final adverse action;
- a summary of information pertaining to an action subject to appeal; and
- the date of an institution's voluntary withdrawal of accreditation.

**L. Sharing Information with Government Entities and Other Accrediting Organizations:** DEAC, upon request, shares with other appropriately recognized accrediting agencies and recognized state agencies information about the accreditation status of a DEAC-accredited institution and any adverse actions or show cause directives it has issued or initiated with respect to that institution. Without limiting the foregoing, DEAC grants all reasonable special requests for accreditation information made by other accrediting organizations and government entities.

**M. Institutional Release of DEAC Regarding Sharing of Information:** Institutions accredited by or seeking accreditation from DEAC provide, as part of their application for accreditation, a release from liability of DEAC with respect to all actions taken by DEAC to elicit, receive, review, and share information from state or federal regulatory agencies, other government entities, third-party accrediting and licensing organizations, employers, businesses, students, and other third parties in connection with and for the purposes of evaluating the institution.

**N. Authorized Disclosure of Information;** When an institution requests specific confidential accreditation information to be released to third parties, the president/CEO of the institution or an institution-designated official must provide a written release on

official letterhead to the executive director stating the precise information to be released and the party or parties to whom the information is to be provided. DEAC will release such information (1) subject to any qualifications or restrictions it may elect to provide with respect to the disclosure and (2) to the extent that release of the information can be effected with minimal cost and effort and does not disclose confidential DEAC orthird-party information.

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

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

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

## XVI. Public Disclosures by Institution

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

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

accredited status as follows:

- Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- DEAC Accredited

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

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

   If an adverse action becomes final after the appeal has been concluded or if the institution elects not to appeal the Commission's decision, DEAC shall so notify the institution and the institution must follow the same reporting and notice requirements as are applicable above with respect to the initiation of an adverse action by the Commission.

**B. Additional Disclosure Requirements:** Institutions must disclose to the public, including on its website in a clear, conspicuous and readily accessible manner, certain additional information as required by state/federal regulation, another governmental agency, or DEAC requirement, including disclosures required under the accreditation standards and DEAC's website checklist (see DEAC website).

**C. Correction of Misleading or Inaccurate Information:** DEAC requires that an accredited institution correct any misleading or inaccurate information it provides to third parties

relating to (a) the institution's accreditation status, DEAC, or the DEAC accreditation process or (b) other information that an institution may be required to disclose under DEAC policies, DEAC accreditation standards, or federal/state regulations or the requirements of other governmental agencies. DEAC will notify the institution of any misleading or inaccurate information that comes to DEAC's attention and request that the institution immediately make the correction, post a notice of the correction, and document to DEAC that the correction has been made. Failure to do so within 10 days may result in a special visit or other review and action, including but not limited to, the issuance of a show cause directive.

## XVII. Interim Monitoring of Accredited Institutions

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

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

**A. Annual Reports:** Each year, DEAC requires the submission of an annual report by each institution holding accreditation status as of December 31 of any given year (see Section XVII.A.8. below). The annual report and all accompanying documentation are due to DEAC in accordance with formats and timelines published or otherwise provided by DEAC. To the extent that the annual report reflects a significant change in any metric, including, by way of example, enrollment or number of programs, the institution must address, within the annual report, the reasons for, impact of, and internal response to the change. DEAC provides the following guidelines to institutions with respect to the threshold changes in enrollments, program numbers, and student achievement data that automatically trigger a requirement for a more extended response and explanation.

1. **Significant Growth or Decline in Enrollments:** DEAC defines significant growth in enrollments as an increase in enrollment of more than 50% in one institutional year (pro-rated as necessary to complete the institution's annual report and updated within 30 days following the end of the institution's institutional year where that is not the calendar year.

2. If an institution reports "significant growth in enrollments," it must: (a) explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the growth and what additional staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans were employed to meet the needs of the increased number of students being served; (b) identify the programs experiencing the most growth by indicating the percentage of growth since the last annual report, listing the reasons for the growth in the identified programs and explaining the institution's plans for accommodating the enrollment growth; and (c) describe any strategic plan or other response the institution is considering or has implemented to address the increase in enrollment numbers.

3. If an institution reports "significant decline in enrollments," it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the decline; the impact on staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans; and any strategic plan or other response the institution is considering or has implemented to address the decline.

4. A "significant decline in enrollments" is defined as an enrollment decline of 25 percent or more since the last annual report.

5. **Significant Growth or Decline in the Number of Programs:** DEAC defines growth in the number of programs as significant if, in a calendar year,

    - an institution offering 1-3 programs adds more than two new programs;
    - an institution offering 4-10 programs adds more than three new programs;
    - an institution offering 11-20 programs adds more than four new programs;
    - an institution offering 21 or more programs adds more than six new programs.

6. If an institution reports "significant growth in the number of programs," it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for the growth and what additional staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans were employed to meet the needs of the increased number of programs being offered, as well as what strategic plans the institution is considering or has implemented to support, continue or limit the growth in programs.

7. If an institution reports "significant decrease in the number of programs," it must explain in detail in the annual report the reason(s) for discontinuing programs and the impact on staff, faculty, administrators, educational and student support services, financial resources, and marketing plans, as well as what strategic plans the institution is considering or has implemented to address the decline in program numbers. A "significant decline in the number of programs" is defined as discontinuing 25 percent or more of its programs since the last annual report.

8. A “program” is a non-degree vocational or certificate program (e.g., medical billing and coding) or a degree program (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice).

9. **Significant Changes in Financial Condition:** The annual report requires the submission of audited financial statements and additional financial information.

    a. An institution participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs reports additional information describing its participation and submits audited comparative financial statements, including its compliance audit for its most recent fiscal year, within 180 days following the end of the fiscal year.
    b. An institution submits audited or reviewed financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years prepared on a comparative basis and in accordance with Standard XIV. Finance. DEAC reviews the financial statements and determines whether further reporting is required or other appropriate action is necessary.

    c. All institutions are required to address and explain any significant change in their financial condition since the previous year’s annual report.

10. **Student Achievement Benchmarks:** If an institution’s student achievement data show completion and graduation rates that are not within the benchmark range established by DEAC, the institution must explain the reasons for not meeting established benchmarks and document corrective actions taken and planned.

11. **Commission Review and Follow-Up Action:** DEAC staff acknowledge the receipt of all annual reports and request additional supporting documentation as necessary. All annual reports are reviewed and summarized by the staff, and significant changes are reported and presented to the Commission. Annually, at its mid-year meeting, the Commission considers any significant items reported by institutions and initiates further follow-up actions as necessary. These may include:

    - placing limits on an institution’s future enrollment or program growth if ongoing compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or procedures is a concern;

    - requesting an institution to provide additional supporting documentation regarding significant growth or decline in enrollments or programs; and/or

    - requesting additional information on any part or parts of an institution’s annual report.

**B. Title IV Program Compliance:** DEAC reviews information provided by an institution participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs to verify (1) continued compliance with its federal student assistance program responsibilities based on the most recent “official cohort default rates” published by the U.S. Department of Education, (2) results of its audited comparative financial statements, and (3) its

compliance audit, program review information, and any other information provided to DEAC by the U.S. Department of Education. DEAC will investigate and the Commission will direct such further action as appropriate if an institution appears to be noncompliant with its FSA Title IV requirements. DEAC is obligated under federal regulations [CFR 602.27(a)(6)] to report to the U.S. Secretary of Education an institution it has reason to believe is failing to meet its Federal Student Assistance Title IV program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse.

**C. Actions by Other Accrediting Agencies:** If another accrediting agency takes a probationary equivalent action or withdraws/revokes the accreditation of a DEAC-accredited institution or program, DEAC will promptly review the accreditation status it has previously granted to that institution to determine whether there is cause to change that status.

**D. Actions by State Agencies:** DEAC reviews and takes appropriate action regarding the accreditation status of any institution for which DEAC has received information from the appropriate state agency that the institution is subject to any of the following actions:

1. An action by a state agency potentially leading to the suspension, withdrawal/revocation, or termination of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education.

2. An action by a state agency to suspend, withdraw/revoke, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education subject to appeal. If a DEAC-accredited institution loses its licensure/authorization in its state of domicile, its accreditation is automatically withdrawn as of the date of the loss of state licensure/authorization. Such a withdrawal of accreditation may be appealed by an institution pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section XII.

**E. Notification Reports:** An institution must immediately notify DEAC, in writing, of any actions the institution plans to take or has taken, or of actions taken or expected to be taken against it by any governmental agency, or accrediting, licensing, or state agency if those actions have the capacity to affect the compliance of the institution with DEAC accreditation standards and/or the reputation of the institution or DEAC, either directly or indirectly (e.g., through media coverage). This includes the institution's resolution of any complaints in a forthright, prompt, and equitable manner to DEAC's satisfaction.

## XVIII. Substantive Changes

**A. Scope and Definition:** A substantive change is one that may significantly affect an institution's quality, mission, scope, operations including primary methods of delivering programs, or control. Substantive changes are reviewed to ensure that changes in educational offerings, teaching modalities, locations, scope of offerings, and control of the institution are or will be made in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. A

substantive change must be approved by the Commission or DEAC senior staff before the change can be implemented and included in the institution's scope of accreditation. Institutions currently operating under a show cause directive may not implement a substantive change unless such change is required to cure an identified deficiency and is approved by the Commission. Similar restrictions may be included in deferral notices, as determined on a case-by-case basis.

The actions listed below are considered substantive changes that require DEAC approval. Institutions should note that DEAC does not allow institutions to establish an "additional location" or a "branch" as these terms are defined in 34 CFR 600.2. See the U.S. Department of Education definitions in the Glossary found in Part Four of the *Accreditation Handbook.*

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

one or more of the institution's educational programs.

16. An institution seeking certification to participate in Federal Student Assistance (FSA) Title IV programs.
17. Any new engagement in international activities beyond that included in the institution's existing grant of accreditation.
18. Any other change that may significantly affect an institution's quality; mission; scope; operations, including primary methods of delivering programs; or control.

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

1. An aggregate change of 25 percent or more of the clock hours, credit hours, or content of a program since the agency's most recent accreditation review.
2. Entering into a written arrangement under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV, HEA programs offers up to 25 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs.

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

**C. Process for Seeking Approval of Substantive Changes:**

1. **Filing of Applicable Form and Review Process:** A more detailed description of the categories of substantive changes covered by this Section XVIII and the process for seeking approval of those changes is set forth below in Section XIX.

2. With respect to applications for approval of a written arrangement with another accredited organization or an unaccredited organization to provide more than 25 percent and up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs, DEAC will make a final decision within 90 days of receipt of a materially complete application, unless it determines that significant circumstances related to the substantive change require further review, to occur within 180 days.

3. **Substantive Change Approvals Delegated to DEAC Senior Staff:** Certain substantive changes may be evaluated by DEAC senior staff rather than the Commission. Any such delegation of authority shall be made by the Commission in its sole discretion. Such substantive changes include:
   a. a change in the institution's name;
   b. the addition of a new program in a field related to a field of study already within the scope of the institution's accreditation;
   c. any new engagement in international activities beyond that included in the

institution's existing grant of accreditation; and

d. any change in the institution's location of the main facility, headquarters or administrative site, or any addition of a facility geographically apart from the main facility.

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

4. **Approvals with Subsequent Site Visit Requirements:** With respect to certain substantive changes approved by the Commission, DEAC requires an on-site visit within six to 12 months following the school's implementation of the change to determine the impact of the change on the institution's continued compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. The institution is required to submit a report providing information specific to the impact of the change prior to the onsite visit. The institution shall also have a reasonable opportunity to respond to the on-site team's findings prior to the Commission's evaluation of whether the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

5. **Notification of Decision:** After evaluating the review file for the proposed substantive change, the Commission (or DEAC staff) determines whether or not and the extent to which the change, when implemented, is likely to affect the compliance of the institution with DEAC accreditation standards is consistent with the institution's mission, and will not be detrimental to students. On that basis, the Commission (or DEAC staff) determines whether to approve or deny the change or require additional review. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of such determination and the effective date. The notice includes a summary of the reasons for the decision and, if further review is required, the parameters of that review including, without limitation, the information and other materials to be provided by the institution and the time frame for the same. DEAC also notifies the USDE and other relevant third parties of a decision to approve or deny a substantive change when required to do so by applicable regulations or when otherwise deemed appropriate by DEAC in its sole and exclusive discretion.

6. In the event of a denial by the Commission of a proposed substantive change, an institution may appeal the Commission's decision to an independent appeals panel pursuant to the provisions of Section XII or take actions designed to address the Commission's identified concerns and resubmit the proposal for substantive change, as supported by the revised record. Denials of substantive changes are not considered adverse actions but are subject to DEAC's appeal procedures.

**D. Cumulative Changes:** Proposed changes or an accumulation of changes implemented or proposed during an institution's accreditation term may be so significant as to

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

## XIX. Process With Respect to Each Substantive Change

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

1. The institution files its application for approval of the proposed change, together with all required supporting documentation, at least 30 days prior to the expected effective date of the change. DEAC staff reviews the application for completeness and requests additional information from the institution as appropriate.

2. The Commission reviews the application and makes a decision whether or not to grant approval of the proposed change, request additional information, defer, or to deny the institution's request. A decision to deny the request may be appealed by the institution.

3. If the application is approved, DEAC may require an on-site visit to occur within six to twelve months following the expected date of implementation of the change to ensure the change, as implemented, did not detrimentally impact the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards. In such cases, the institution submits at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site evaluation a report on the effect of the substantive change on the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards together with any supporting documentation required by the report.

4. The institution receives a copy of the Chair's Report setting forth the findings of the on-

site evaluation team and is afforded 30 days in which to respond to such report. The response may include such additional data, information, materials, and supporting documentation as the institution deems relevant.

5. The Commission reviews the substantive change Record, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards following implementation of the substantive change, or takes action in accordance with Section X. In either case, DEAC notifies the institution of the decision in a letter setting forth the basis for the decision. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information- sharing procedures.

**A. Change of Core Mission or Objectives:** An institution seeking to substantively depart from its core mission or objectives requires prior approval because the institution's accreditation is predicated on its core mission.

1. A significant alteration in the institution's core mission or objectives signals a change throughout the institution. Accordingly, in reviewing an institution's proposed change in its core mission or objectives, the Commission will be evaluating the institution's application based on a demonstration that the institution's proposed change is supported by its operations and infrastructure and is otherwise in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

2. An institution seeking approval for a change in its core mission or objectives follows the standard substantive change process.

**B. Change of Name:**

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

2. An institution seeking approval for a change in its name follows the standard substantive change process.

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

1. **Change in Legal Status Definition:** A "change in legal status" is defined as a change in the legal definition of the company or corporation, which is typically defined by the state or United States government, such as changing from a for- profit to a nonprofit or from an S Corporation to an LLC.

2. **Control Definition:** "Control" is the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution. Examples of change of "form of control" are (1) the sale of all or majority interest of the institution's assets, (2) sale or assignment of the controlling interest of the voting stock of a corporation that owns the institution or that controls the institution through one or more subsidiaries, (3) merger or consolidation of the institution with other institutions, or (4) an independent corporation owning an institution that becomes a subsidiary of another corporation with a different ownership. When an institution changes its form of control, as defined as the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution, it is essentially changing ownership.

3. **Change of Ownership Definition:** A "change of ownership" is any transaction or combination of transactions that would result in a change in the control of an accredited institution.

4. A proposed transfer of ownership is approved based on the new owners, governing board members, and administrators possessing the capacity to own and operate a DEAC-accredited institution. The new ownership's financial condition includes sufficient resources to continue sound institutional operations in fulfillment of all commitments to enrolled students. The financial stability allows the institution to remain in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

5. The institution's proposed new owners, governing board members, and administrators possess sound reputations and show a record of integrity and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The proposed new owners, board members, officials, and executive staff are free from any association with misfeasance, including any government enforcement action, owning, managing, or controlling any educational institutions that entered into bankruptcy or closed, to the detriment of the students.

6. An institution authorized for and participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs assumes the responsibility of ensuring timely notification and submission of reports to DEAC to facilitate an orderly transfer of ownership and continuation of institutional eligibility. The Change of Legal Status, Control, or Ownership Report requires that copies of filings and submissions to the U.S. Department of Education be included, along with any correspondence received from the Department. The U.S. Department of Education has time-sensitive regulations regarding change of legal status, control, or ownership for institutions participating in federal student aid programs.

7. An institution seeking approval for a change in legal status, form of control, or ownership follows the standard substantive change process. Without limiting the foregoing, the institution must notify DEAC in writing within 10 days following the effective date of its change in legal status, form of control, or ownership and receive an on-site evaluation within six months of the transaction closing.

**D. Change of Location**

1. An institution seeking a change of location (however close to the original site) is required to obtain prior approval from DEAC staff.

2. The institution provides evidence that it has state approval for the activity that it conducts at the new location.

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

**E. New Administrative Site**

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

2. An institution seeking approval for a new administrative site follows the standard substantive change process.

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

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

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

a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and selects approximately 25 percent of courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a memo indicating the instructions for the curricular review and courses required for submission.

b. Submit the appropriate educational offerings report as directed by DEAC staff, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review if applicable.

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

2. **Addition of a New Related-Field Non-Degree Program: Vocational or Non-Credit-bearing Certificate Program:** This involves any addition of a new non-degree vocational or non-credit-bearing program in a related field of study consistent with the educational offerings reviewed when the institution was last evaluated.

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

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI). DEAC sends the institution a memo with the instructions for the curricular review.

   b. Submit the appropriate educational offerings report as directed by DEAC staff. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site specialist review fee.

   c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review, if applicable.

   d. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's

response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the application. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

3. **Addition of a New Related-Field Non-Degree Program: Credit-bearing Certificate Program:** This involves any addition of a new non-degree credit- bearing certificate program in a related field of study consistent with the educational offerings reviewed when the institution was last evaluated.

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

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and selects approximately 25 percent of courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a memo indicating the instructions for the curricular review and courses required for submission.

   b. Submit the appropriate educational offerings report as directed by DEAC staff, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the off- site specialist review fee.

   c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards. The institution will be invoiced for the follow-up subject specialist review, if applicable.

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

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

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

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and

selects approximately fifty percent of the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a memo indicating the instructions for the curricular review and courses required for submission.

b. Submit the appropriate Educational Offerings Report as directed by DEAC staff, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the request materials within 60 days otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review if applicable.

d. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the new degree program.

e. **Post-Approval On-Site Visit:** The institution receives an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new degree program and enrolling students to ensure ongoing compliance with DEAC standards. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.

f. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information- sharing procedures.

5. **Addition of a New Program in an Unrelated-Field for a Non-Degree Program: Vocational or Non-credit-bearing Certificate Program:** This involves any addition of a new non-degree or vocational or non-credit- bearing certificate program in an unrelated field of study not currently approved within the institution's scope of accreditation.

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

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable fee. . DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Report (EOI). DEAC sends the institution a memo with the instructions for the curricular review.

b. Submit the appropriate Educational Offerings Report as directed by DEAC staff. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the subject specialist review fee.

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up review if applicable.

d. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the new degree program.

e. Post-Approval On-Site Visit: At the discretion of the Commission, the institution may receive an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new non-degree vocational or non-credit- bearing certificate 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.

f. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

6. **Addition of a New Program in an Unrelated-Field for a Non-Degree Program: Credit-bearing Certificate Program:** This involves any addition of a new non-degree credit-bearing certificate program in an unrelated field of study not currently approved within the institution's scope of accreditation.

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

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Report (EOI) and selects approximately 50 percent of courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a memo indicating the instructions for the curricular review and courses required for submission.

   b. Submit the appropriate Educational Offerings Report as directed by DEAC staff. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the

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

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up review if applicable.

d. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the new degree program.

e. **Post-Approval On-Site Visit:** At the discretion of the Commission, the institution may receive an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new non-degree vocational/non-credit-bearing certificate 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.

f. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

7. **Addition of a Program at a Different Degree or Credential Level:** This involves any addition of a program at a degree or credential level different from the educational offerings currently included in the institution's scope of accreditation.

   These are the steps for obtaining Commission approval of this substantive change.

   a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and selects approximately fifty percent of the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a memo indicating the instructions for the curricular review and the courses required for submission.

   b. Submit the appropriate Educational Offerings Report as directed by DEAC staff, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

c. The institution receives the off- site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partly met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review, if applicable.

d. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval, including the initial subject specialist report, institution's response, and follow-up subject specialist report, if applicable. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the new degree program.

e. **Post-Approval On-Site Visit:** The institution receives an on-site visit six months to one year after implementing the new program and enrolling students. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.

f. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

**G. Academic Units of Measurement**

1. Institutions may define their programs in terms of credit hours or clock hours and thereby adopt a common classification system that is understood and recognized by the higher education community.

2. **Significant Increase or Decrease in Clock or Credit Hours:** The alteration of a course or program that represents significant modification in the objectives or content of an approved course or program is considered a substantive change. As a general rule, this means any increase or decrease in clock or credit hours of an existing course/program from the original date of course/program approval, the date of approval of a previous substantive change to the course/program, or the most recent grant of accreditation.

3. **Changing from Clock to Credit Hours:** An institution changing an educational offering from clock to credit hours is a substantive change.

4. **Changing the Way an Institution Measures Student Progress**: This includes whether the institution measures progress in clock hours or credit-hours, semesters, trimesters, or quarters or uses time-based or non-time-based methods.

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

a. Submit Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable application fee. DEAC

reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and selects approximately 25 percent of the educational content that the institution has selected to convert from clock hours to credit hours or to change in how it measures student progress.

b. The institution submits the appropriate educational offerings report and documentation, as directed by DEAC staff, for an off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the off-site specialist review fee.

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review, if applicable.

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

**H. Addition of an In-Residence Program Component:** This substantive change applies when the fulfillment of the learning outcomes of a course/program requires or offers the option of in-person delivery of curriculum, learning of certain manual skills, familiarity with specialized equipment, access to learning resources, or the application of certain techniques under professional supervision. DEAC reviews the Addition of an In-Residence Program Application and evaluates how the residential component complements, enhances, and applies the knowledge acquired from the approved courses for the program.

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

a. Submit an Addition of an In-Residence Program Component Application and application fee. If the institution is adding an in-residence component to a new program, it must also follow the appropriate application process above for adding a new program.

b. The Commission reviews the entire record associated with the application being considered for approval. The Commission may approve, defer, or deny the application.

c. If the application is approved, DEAC may require an on-site visit to occur within six to twelve months following the expected date of implementation of the change to ensure the change, as implemented, did not detrimentally impact the institution's compliance

with DEAC accreditation standards. In such cases, the institution submits at least five weeks prior to the scheduled on-site evaluation a report on the effect of the substantive change on the institution's compliance with DEAC accreditation standards together with any supporting documentation required by the report.

d. The institution receives a copy of the Chair's Report setting forth the findings of the on-site evaluation team and is afforded 30 days in which to respond to such report. The response may include such additional data, information, materials, and supporting documentation as the institution deems relevant.

e. The Commission reviews the substantive change Record, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution has remained in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards following implementation of the substantive change, or takes action in accordance with Section X. In either case, DEAC sends a letter to the institution, within 30 days following the Commission's decision that notifies them of the decision and sets forth the basis for the same. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information- sharing procedures.

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

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

a. Submit a Change in Educational Offerings Application and applicable fee. DEAC reviews the application and Educational Offerings Information Sheet (EOI) and selects the sampling of programs or courses for subject specialist review.

b. Submit the appropriate educational offerings report and access to the requested materials for off-site subject specialist review. The institution must submit the requested materials within 60 days, otherwise the application may expire. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

c. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 60 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards. The institution will receive an invoice for the follow-up subject specialist review if applicable.

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

**J. Contracting for Educational Delivery:** Substantive change requirements for an institution that contracts with an unaccredited organization or organization not certified to participate in the Title IV HEA programs to provide more than 25 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs are applicable to:

a. an accredited institution that enters into a contract with another accredited organization or unaccredited entity to provide more than 25 percent up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs, or

b. an institution certified to participate in Title IV HEA programs that enters into a contract with an institution or organization not certified to participate in Title IV programs to provide more than 25 percent up to 50 percent of one or more of the institution's educational programs

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

a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application and applicable fee. The Commission reviews the application and all documentation submitted to date and may approve, defer or deny the application to contract with a third party for educational delivery. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action.

b. Contingent upon receiving approval of the contract, the institution submits a Change in Educational Offerings Application. DEAC reviews the applications and selects the courses required for review. DEAC sends the institution a letter indicating the courses required for submission based on the selection criteria in accordance with DEAC procedures for curriculum review. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

c. The institution submits the appropriate educational offerings report, including the identified courses for off-site subject specialist review. The institution receives the off-site subject specialist report and has 30 days to respond to any determination of partially met or unmet standards.

d. Upon receipt of the record submitted with respect to the curriculum, the Commission may approve, defer, or deny the curriculum proposed for the contract for educational delivery. If the Commission approves the curriculum and, provided

that no intervening circumstances have occurred since the Commission's approval of the contract which might require a re-evaluation of the same, the Commission will grant final approval for the proposed substantive change. (Examples of such intervening circumstances may include but are not limited to the introduction of new information relating to either the accredited institution or the unaccredited institution which raise questions as to whether either or both can fulfill the proposed contract, a significant change in enrollment by the accredited institution, or another material event occurring with respect to the accredited institution.)

e. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and, as applicable, notifies the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information- sharing procedures.

**K. Contracting for Educational Delivery with an Approved AQC Provider:** Upon Commission approval, an institution seeking to improve or expand its educational offerings to students can enter into an agreement to incorporate or contract for educational delivery up to 50 percent of its curriculum with an approved AQC or Approved Quality Curriculum provider. An institution seeking to contract 26 percent to 50 percent of its curriculum for educational delivery with an approved AQC provider follows the steps below.

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

a. Submit a Contracting for Educational Delivery Application indicating the contracted courses selected and additional supporting documentation. The institution will receive an invoice for the review fee.

b. The Commission reviews all documentation submitted to date and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action.

**L. Addition of a New Division:** Adding a new division under a parent institution that establishes an identity and program offerings in a subject area or a number of related subject areas that are different from those offered by the parent institution is a substantive change.

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

a. Submit an Application for a New Division, including required documentation, 30 days prior to the proposed change. The completed application and documentation are presented to the Commission for approval.

b. Identify the programs that are proposed for the new division by submitting the

Application for a Change in Educational Offerings.

c. **Post-Approval On-Site Report and Visit:** Once the new division and program(s) are implemented, the institution submits a streamlined SER five weeks prior to the on-site visit.

d. The institution receives an on-site visit within six months to one year after implementing the new division and enrolling students. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.

e. The Commission reviews the representations made by the institution in its application for the substantive change, the substantive change record, to include the Chair's Report and institutional response, and either determines that the institution remains in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards or takes action in accordance with Section X. The institution is notified of the Commission's decision within 30 days. As applicable, DEAC provides notice to the U.S. Secretary of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

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

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

2. It is DEAC's expectation that any accredited institution electing to participate in FSA Title IV programs will comply with all federal program responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, as amended, without exception.

3. For each institution that elects to participate in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs, DEAC examines (a) the record of the institution's compliance with its federal program responsibilities under FSA Title IV regulations, based on the most recent "official cohort default rates" published by the U.S. Department of Education; (b) the results of its audited financial statements; and (c) the institution's compliance audits, any program reviews conducted by the US Department of Education, and any other information that the U.S. Department of Education may provide to DEAC. DEAC takes action, as appropriate, when any of the information suggests that the institution may be failing to meet DEAC's standards.

4. An institution jeopardizes its accredited status with DEAC if it is found by DEAC or the appropriate federal authorities or a relevant state authority to be in significant noncompliance with its FSA Title IV program responsibilities or requirements.

5. **Scope of Activity:** The institution may elect to become an FSA Title IV program eligible institution and not participate in any Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs. Any programs selected for FSA Title IV program participation must meet the federal minimum requirements for program eligibility, as well as meeting DEAC's requirements. (Note: The U.S. Department of Education considers an eligible institution to be the "sum of its eligible programs.")

6. **Eligibility:** The institution that uses, or seeks to use, accreditation by DEAC to establish eligibility to participate in FSA Title IV programs must first offer "distance education" courses as defined under the formal definition established by the U.S. Department of Education.

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

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

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

8. **Licensure:** The institution that uses, or seeks to use, accreditation by DEAC to establish eligibility to participate in FSA Title IV programs must have a charter, license, or formal

authority from all appropriate government bodies to offer its programs or courses, when such authority is available or required. The loss of state licensure or required authority to operate results in the simultaneous loss of DEAC accreditation and Title IV eligibility.

9. **Limit on Participation and Significant Growth Triggers:** Revenue from all FSA Title IV programs by eligible institutions may not account for more than 50 percent of an institution's total revenue during its first 12 months of eligibility for FSA Title IV program participation, and not more than 75 percent of its revenue for all subsequent years of participation until such time that the institution (a) receives renewal of accreditation while participating in Title IV programs and (b) demonstrates that its three-year cohort default rate and financial statement composite score fall within acceptable ranges as prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education. Once the institution documents it meets the aforementioned requirements it may submit a request for the Commission's approval to exceed 75 percent of its revenue from FSA Title IV programs. The Commission, at its next scheduled regular meeting, will consider this record and the institution's ongoing compliance with accreditation standards and determine whether to approve the institution to draw the maximum revenue from FSA Title IV programs allowed under applicable Title IV regulations. Institutions must report the percentage of revenues derived from Title IV funds to DEAC using the same calculation methodology that is used when reporting revenues derived from Title IV funds to the U.S. Department of Education and as presented in the Title IV compliance audit. Revenues received from students who enrolled in an institution's programs prior to the date on which FSA Title IV program eligibility was granted and who subsequently elect to receive FSA Title IV funds will not be included in the institution's FSA Title IV program revenues.

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

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

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

    a. A key person from the institution attends the DEAC *Title IV Financial Aid Seminar*. The institution then submits an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Application.

b. The institution must then submit an Eligibility for Federal Student Assistance Title IV Program Report that identifies programs intended for participation in FSA Title IV programs.

c. The institution receives an on-site visit to verify its compliance with federal minimum requirements and DEAC standards and procedures. The institution receives a Chair's Report and has 30 days to respond with any additional information or documentation necessary to support the substantive change.

d. The Commission reviews the evaluation files for the institution's application for Title IV eligibility certification and approves or denies the substantive change in accordance with accreditation standards. DEAC notifies the institution in writing within 30 days of the Commission's action and notifies the U.S. Department of Education and other relevant constituencies in accordance with its notification and information-sharing procedures.

11. An institution participating in FSA Title IV programs must pay particular attention to documenting and demonstrating compliance with the following federal requirements.

a. **Mission:** The institution's educational offerings are in a field of study in which the institution demonstrates competence.

b. **Satisfactory Academic Progress:** The institution implements and publishes a satisfactory academic progress policy that complies with all Federal Student Assistance Title IV program requirements as stated in current federal regulations.

c. **Regular and Substantive Interaction:** The institution implements policies and procedures that assure regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty in accordance with the federal definition of distance education (see 34 CFR §600 and 34 CFR §668). The institution maintains records to document that appropriate interactions occur throughout the student's enrollment.

d. **Competency-Based or Direct Assessment Programs:** The institution must seek prior approval for every competency-based or direct assessment program, as well as for every concentration of each competency-based or direct assessment program. These programs are subject to the federal definition of distance education that requires substantial interaction between students and faculty. The competencies established for such programs build a unified body of knowledge that is consistent with a discipline or profession. Institutions applying for prior approval use the relevant Change in Educational Offerings application form.

e. **Career and Financial Aid Advising:** The institution makes available to students, upon request, career advising related to their program of study. The institution makes available financial aid advising to all students in need of financial assistance,

students that are applying for financial assistance, and other persons seeking additional information regarding the process for applying for and receiving federal student assistance. Such advising may take place via a variety of media sources and communication methods. Upon request of the student, the institution provides personal assistance on questions related to the application and delivery of financial aid.

f. **Entrance and Exit Loan Advising:** The institution conducts entrance and exit loan advising that encourages loan repayment. The institution, through the financial aid office and the use of available media, encourages repayment of any FSA student loan funds that were obtained for payment of the tuition and other costs associated with the student's attendance and enrollment in the institution's educational offerings.

g. **Disclosures:** Any statements the institution makes in any advertising, promotional literature, or other materials are complete and accurate about (1) its eligibility for or participation in FSA Title IV programs, (2) its efforts to become certified to participate in such programs, and/or (3) the availability of FSA Title IV benefits to students who enroll at the institution. The institution will not use the availability of FSA Title IV funds to students as the primary inducement or rationale for students to enroll in a program.

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

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

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

i. **Refund Policy:** The institution has and implements a fair and equitable refund policy in compliance with state requirements or, in the absence of such requirements, in accordance with DEAC's refund policy standards. The institution discloses the date from which refunds are calculated (e.g., the date of determination of withdrawal or

termination). The institution complies first with the Return of Title IV requirements when a student who is an FSA Title IV recipient withdraws from an institution.

j. **Federal Student Assistance Administrator:** The institution employs a capable individual(s) responsible for administering all FSA Title IV programs in which it participates and for coordinating those programs with the institution's other financial assistance programs. The institution employs other individuals, as needed, to assist in the administration of FSA Title IV programs.

k. **Default Management Plan:** The institution's default management plan addresses student loan information (borrower's rights and responsibilities, information regarding repayment and consolidation of student loan debt, communications with lenders and loan servicing agents, and the consequences of default), advising and monitoring, cooperation with lenders, and collecting information to facilitate location of borrowers. The institution documents implementation of the default management program and regularly conducts an evaluation of the effectiveness of its efforts as part of its self-study program. The published cohort rate for the institution for any cohort year—where 30 or more borrowers enter repayment—cannot exceed the allowable rate as prescribed by the U.S. Department of Education.

   Institutions that receive a published rate greater than 25 percent are required to implement and adhere to a default reduction plan that specifically outlines the means by which the institution will provide services and contacts to the borrowers in an attempt to reduce the cohort default rate.

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

m. **Program Reviews:** The institution notifies DEAC in writing within 10 days of having undergone any program reviews, inspections, or other reviews of its participation in Federal Student Assistance Title IV programs by the U.S. Department of Education. The institution also provides complete copies of any reports (both preliminary and final) of these reviews and provides any available compliance audits within 10 days of its receipt of these documents.

n. **Bankruptcy:** An institution that files for federal bankruptcy protection simultaneously and immediately forfeits its DEAC-accredited status and Federal Student Assistance Title IV program eligibility.

o. **Renewal of Accreditation:** Since the length of the FSA Title IV programs certification extends only through the institution's current term of accreditation, the institution

must renew its compliance with FSA Title IV programs as part of its renewal of accreditation. The institution must readdress the FSA Title IV statements in its Self-Evaluation Report. During the on-site evaluation, an evaluator with expertise in FSA Title IV programs verifies the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report.

**N. Engaging in International Activities**

1. An institution seeking to add active international functions (e.g., training sites, recruiting, instruction, marketing, business) outside the United States, add coordinating offices in another country, or contract with foreign agents or educational entities is required to obtain prior approval from the Commission. (See Part Four, Appendices, Section XV, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*)

2. An accredited institution offering educational programs outside of its home country must obtain all appropriate external approvals where required, including higher education system administration, and relevant government bodies. The institution documents the accepted legal basis for its operation in the host country and meets legal requirements of the host country.

3. An institution seeking approval to engage in international activities follows the standard substantive change process.

## XX. Non-Substantive Changes

Non-substantive changes are those changes that require review and confirmation by DEAC staff prior to implementation but do not require prior approval by the Commission as is the case for substantive changes. Institutions submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing any required documentation or information.

Upon review of the non-substantive change request, DEAC may determine that certain characteristics in the change require that the institution undertake additional reporting obligations and/or a site visit following implementation of the change in order to ensure that the change did not have a detrimental impact on the institution's students, its compliance with DEAC accreditation standards, and its adherence to its educational mission. The Non- Substantive Change Request Form and associated fees information can be found on the DEAC website. The following are non-substantive changes:

**A. Change of President/Chief Executive Officer:** When an institution makes a change in its president/CEO, defined as the replacement of the senior-level executive of the institution since the last accreditation evaluation, it must immediately notify DEAC in writing. The institution must submit the Non- Substantive Change Request Form and a letter providing a full explanation of when the change of president/CEO is being made, why it is being made, and how the change will affect the institution's capacity to continue to meet all DEAC accreditation standards.

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

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

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

2. **Course Title Revisions:** An institution that changes the title or code of a course without changing the instructional content or objectives of the course.

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

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

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

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

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

approved program.

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

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

1. the rationale for the implementation;

2. a curriculum map outlining the scope and sequence of the courses for the certificate- level credential;

3. a description of program outcomes;

4. evidence that offering the certificate-level credential is aligned with industry requirements for entering or advancing in a profession; and

5. a statement certifying that the courses used to create the certificate program are the same courses included by DEAC as part of the institution's DEAC-approved program.

6. DEAC reserves the right to direct the institution to provide additional information upon request or undergo a substantive change review.

**D. General Education Revisions**: An institution changing general education requirements or replacing discrete general education courses by embedding general education outcomes within courses in accordance Standard V.B submits the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter outlining the change, the reason for the change, and certifying that these are the only revisions to the course or program, as well as a curriculum map that that clearly identifies where general education outcomes are presented. DEAC reserves the right to direct the institution to undergo a review from a subject specialist.

**E. Contracting for Educational Delivery with an Approved AQC Provider, Accredited Institution, or Other Entity:** An institution can enter into an agreement to contract for

educational delivery of up to 25 percent of its curriculum with an Approved Quality Curriculum (AQC) provider, an accredited institution, an entity that does not have accreditation, or organization not certified to participate in Title IV HEA programs by submitting the Non-Substantive Change Request Form and a letter listing the acquired courses, the courses that will be replaced, the reason for the change, and the faculty responsible for reviewing and providing instruction and certifying that these are the only revisions to the course or program.

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

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

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

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

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

**H. Division Identity:** Institutions seeking to organize existing programs into a division that that will continue to operate as part of the institution must submit the Non-Substantive Change Request Form, associated fee payment, and a letter providing a complete description of how the institution will disclose the division as part of the broader educational offerings and clearly delineate the relationship between the division and

the institution. Institutions seeking to add a division under a parent institution that establishes a discrete identity from the parent institution must apply for prior approval of a substantive change and submit the Application for a Division.

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

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

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

## XXI. Teach-Out Plans

**A.** Institutions must submit to DEAC for its approval a comprehensive, writtenteach-out plan (as defined in 34 CFR §600.2 and as further defined under subsection B below), for its enrolled students when any of the events listed below occur. In addition, and if practicable, the institution shall submit a teach-out agreement (as defined in 34 CFR §600.2 and as further defined under subsection C below) if any of the events described below occur:

1. The U.S. Department of Education has notified DEAC of an action against the institution pursuant to Federal Regulations, Section 487 (f) [20 USC 1099 b], to

include placing the institution on the reimbursement payment method under 34 CFR §668.162(c) or the heightened cash monitoring payment method requiring a review of the institution's supporting documentation under 34 CFR §668.162(d)(2).

2. The U.S. Department of Education has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution's participation in any Title IV HEA program.

3. The Secretary notifies the agency that the institution is participating in TitleIV HEA programs under a provisional program participation agreement, and the Secretary has required a teach-out plan as a condition of participation.

4. The U.S. Department of Education notifies DEAC of a determination by the institution's independent auditor expressing doubt about the institution's ability to operate as a going concern or indicating an adverse opinion or a finding of material weakness related to financial stability.

5. DEAC has independently made a determination that the institution appears to lack sufficient financial resources to sustain effective operation in meeting obligations to students.

6. The institution enters bankruptcy.

7. DEAC has withdrawn accreditation from the institution.

8. DEAC has directed the institution to show cause as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

9. A state licensing or authorizing agency notifies DEAC that the institution's license or legal authorization has been or will be revoked or that the state agency has sanctioned the institution for reasons relevant to the institution's continued compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

10. The institution has notified DEAC that it intends to cease operations.

**B. Teach-Out Plan:** At a minimum, the proposed teach-out plan must ensure that all students who are enrolled at the institution receive all of the training or education under the terms of their contracts, including receiving all learning materials and student services on a timely basis.

1. There are two approaches to teach-out plans:

   a. The institution plans to teach-out its own students.
   b. An executed teach-out agreement is in place with one or more appropriately

accredited institutions currently offering programs similar to those offered at the closing institution.

2. Minimum components for any teach-out plan:

   a. A listing by name, student number, email address, and telephone number of all students in each program, the program requirements each student has completed, and their estimated completion/graduation dates.
   b. The institution's financial obligations to each student, including, unearned tuition, all current refunds due, and account balances.
   c. Academic programs offered by the institution and the names of other institutions that offer similar programs and that could potentially enter into a teach-out agreement with the institution.
   d. Arrangements made for the secure safekeeping of all student records, including educational, accounting, and financial aid records, in a location that can be readily accessed by students (with respect to their own records), by DEAC, and by state and federal regulators, and otherwise in accordance with applicable legal requirements in the event the institution closes.
   e. The arrangement with a third-party repository for student transcripts from which students can obtain copies of their transcripts for a minimal fee.
   f. Instructions on how curricula and learning management software may be accessed by students if the institution is conducting its own teach-out.
   g. An explanation, accompanied by appropriate supporting documentation and timelines, of how the closing institution will notify students in the event of closure and, as applicable, how the closing institution will notify the students of their teach-out options and ability to transfer credits.
   h. A copy of all notifications related to the institution's closure or to teach-out options to ensure that (i) the information accurately represents students' ability to transfer credits, and (ii) DEAC may require changes in the language of the notifications to correct, clarify, or otherwise amend representations in the notification to the extent DEAC becomes aware of information which suggests such changes are advisable.
   i. For institutions offering hybrid programs (distance study and required face-to-face instruction), an explanation and evidence of how the teach-out institution has the capacity to provide the students with instruction and services without requiring the students to move or travel substantial distances from the closing institution, and evidence of the adequacy of the teach-out institution's facilities and equipment.
   j. A statement showing evidence that state regulations regarding any student protection funds and/or bonds are followed, if applicable.
   k. A statement that describes any additional charges/fees and notification to students about the charges/fees.
   l. A description of what financial resources will be used to make student refunds or fund the teach-out.

m. A plan to provide all potentially eligible students with information about how to obtain a closed school discharge and, if applicable, information on state refund policies.
n. A record retention plan, to be provided to all enrolled students, that delineates the final disposition of teach-out records (e.g., student transcripts, billing, financial aid records).
o. Information on the number and types of credits the teach-out institution is willing to accept prior to the student's enrollment.
p. A clear statement to students of the tuition and fees of the educational program and the number and types of credits that will be accepted by the teach-out institution.
q. The name, title, email address, telephone number, office address, and other relevant contact information for the person or persons who will act as the primary liaison(s) between the institution and DEAC throughout the period of the teach-out. Such information is to be updated as necessary through the teach-out period.

3. DEAC notifies the relevant accrediting agency of DEAC's approval or rejection of a teach-out plan that includes a program or institution accredited by such other agency. DEAC also notifies any state, federal or other agency or program which it has reason to believe may be affected by the teach-out plan.

**C. Teach-Out Agreement:** When a DEAC institution is required to submit a teach-out agreement under Section (A) above, the agreement must be approved by DEAC prior to implementation. DEAC approves teach-out agreements only if the agreement offers educational services consistent with DEAC accreditation standards and the institution's teach-out plan, satisfies the requirements of 34 CFR 600.2 and other state and federal regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students being served. The teach-out institution, whether it is the institution submitting the plan or another institution providing the teach-out:

1. Must have the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, delivery modality, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations. However, while an option via an alternate method of delivery may be made available to students, such an option is not sufficient unless an option via the same method of delivery as the original educational program is also provided.

2. Must have the capacity to carry out its mission and meet all obligations to existing students.

3. Must demonstrate that it:

a. can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel for substantial distances or durations; and
b. will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

The teach-out institution may not be an institution that itself has been or is required to submit a teach-out plan under Section A above or is under investigation, subject to an action, or being prosecuted for an issue related to academic quality, misrepresentation, fraud, or other severe matters by a law enforcement agency.

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

1. The agreement is with one or more institutions accredited by an agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The institution is state- licensed and currently offers programs similar to those at the closing institution.

2. The agreement states that the student will be provided access to all the programs of instruction, without additional cost, that the student originally contracted and paid for but did not receive, due to the [pending] closure of the institution. For hybrid programs, the teach-out institution must be near the closing institution so that the students are not required to move or travel substantial distances.

3. The agreement clarifies the financial responsibilities of all parties, including the assumption of any liabilities for tuition refunds and appropriate notification to students in a timely manner of additional charges/fees, if any.

4. The agreement states whether, upon completion of the program, the student will receive a diploma, certificate, or degree from the teach-out institution or whether the diploma or certificate will be awarded by the closing institution.

5. The agreement indicates whether students who (a) had already enrolled but had not yet started their program of study at the closing institution or (b) are on a leave of absence from the closing institution, will be entitled to begin training or re-enroll at the teach-out institution.

6. The agreement states that the closing institution will provide the teach-out institution with copies of the following records for the students being taught out:
   - Enrollment agreements
   - Financial aid transcripts
   - Study/progress records
   - Academic transcripts
   - Student account records
   - Any relevant curricular materials

7. The agreement requires that the teach-out institution maintain records and documents for the students being taught out and that the teach-out institution will report to DEAC on a periodic basis on the status of the teach-out.

8. The agreement provides for appropriate notification to DEAC and federal and state authorities.

Notwithstanding the provisions in this section, DEAC may waive requirements regarding the percentage of credits that must be earned by a student at the institution awarding the educational credential if the student is completing his/her/their program through a written teach-out agreement or transfer. Factors DEAC would typically consider in granting any such waiver would include, (1) the previous coursework completed by the student before the teach-out began, (2) whether the student had completed all core requirements for the educational credential, (3) non-academic experience of the student within the field covered by the educational credential, (4) the evaluation received by the student for the capstone project required for the credential, if applicable, (5) teacher and/or employer recommendations, (6) the student's grades in the applicable field, (7) whether the student completed coursework in an adjacent or connected field, and (8) hardship to the student if a waiver is not granted.

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

## XXII. Complaints (Accredited Institutions, Active Applicants, and DEAC)

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

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

release authorizing DEAC to forward a copy of the complaint, including identification of the complainant(s) to the institution.

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

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

DEAC will not intervene on behalf of individuals in cases of a personnel action, nor will it review an institution's internal administrative decisions in such matters as admissions decisions, academic honesty, assignment of grades, and similar matters unless the context of an allegation suggests that unethical or unprofessional conduct or action may have occurred that might call into question the institution's compliance with a DEAC standard or policy. Further, where the alleged circumstances giving rise to the complaint have occurred so long ago that (1) investigating and ascertaining the facts would be difficult, and (2) DEAC has reason to believe that the complaint alleges practices or actions which are no longer present at the institution, DEAC will so inform the complainant and will advise the complainant that, without further demonstration from the complainant that the allegations relating to the institution's compliance with DEAC standards are likely to be an ongoing threat to the institution's students, faculty or academic integrity, DEAC is unlikely to pursue the claim. Decisions made by DEAC in evaluating third party complaints shall be made in its sole discretion, consistent with the guidelines set forth above. A summary of DEAC's disposition of each complaint under this section is reported to the Commission for review and to take such further action as the Commission may deem appropriate.

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

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

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

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

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

1. Within ten business days following receipt of the complaint, DEAC will send aletter or email to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the process that the DEAC will follow in investigating the complaint.

2. DEAC will complete an initial review of the complaint within fifteen business days following its receipt to determine whether it sets forth information or allegations that reasonably suggest that an institution may not be in compliance with DEAC's standards and procedures. If additional information or clarification is required, before DEAC believes it can pursue a further investigation of the complaint, DEAC will so notify the complainant and request the complainant provide the additional information. Failure of the complainant to provide such additional information may result in DEAC determining that the complaint cannot be effectively investigated.

3. If DEAC determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations do not reasonably demonstrate that an institution is out of compliance with DEAC standards or procedures or that the complainant has not provided sufficient information on which DEAC can evaluate it, the complaint will not be further investigated by DEAC and the complainant will be notified of such a disposition and the reasons.

4. If DEAC determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations reasonably suggest that an institution may not be in compliance with DEAC standards and procedures, the DEAC will provide a copy of the original complaint to the institution and direct the institution to provide a response to the complaint within 30 days following such notice with the following exceptions:

    a. In cases of advertising violations, when DEAC staff forwards a copy of the advertisement at issue to the institution, citing the standard that might have been violated. The institution is required to respond within **15 days** of receiving such notice.

    b. If a news article or media broadcast carries a negative report on a DEAC-accredited institution, or any of its owners, senior management, or executives, the institution is required to respond to the statement(s) within **15 days**.

    c. Where complaints are from students concerning administrative services, student services, educational services, or tuition, the institution will be required to respond directly to the student within **15 days** to address his/her concerns. The institution must also respond to DEAC within **15 days;** and the response must include, at minimum, a copy of the response sent to the student.

    d. The failure of the institution to provide either a response to the complaint or any additional information as requested by the executive director within the specified time frames will be considered a violation of DEAC's policy on complaints and will be referred to the Commission for consideration and action. The complainant will be notified when a request for a response from the institution has been delivered by DEAC.

5. If, following review of the institutional response to the complaint, DEAC concludes that the allegations in the complaint have been rebutted or resolved by the institution, the complainant and the institution will be notified of such resolution.

6. On no less than a semi-annual basis, DEAC will provide the Commission with a list of all complaints closed by the executive director and a summary of the reasons for closing each such complaint. The Commission may, in its discretion, elect to reopen any such complaint for further investigation and resolution.

7. If DEAC concludes following review of the institution's first response to the complaint, that the allegations may establish that there has been a violation of DEAC standards and/or procedures, DEAC may take one of the following actions:

    a. Defer resolution on the complaint for a period not to exceed 60 days if there is evidence that the institution is making progress in rectifying the situation. Failure by the institution to rectify the situation by the end of the 60-day period will be referred to the Commission for consideration and action.

    b. Notify the institution that, based on the information provided, one or more of the issues raised by the complaint has been referred to the Commission for further action.

    c. The complainant will be informed of any deferral provided under this section and/or of whether any issues raised by the complaint have been referred to the Commission.

8. DEAC will send a letter to the complainant and the institution regarding the final disposition of each complaint. A record of the complaint and associated documentation (including any institutional response and additional information provided by the institution or the complainant together with any materials prepared or collected by DEAC) is kept on file.

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

**G. Complaints about Applicant Institutions:** If DEAC receives a complaint about an applicant institution, it is treated as a third-party comment pursuant to the procedures set forth in Section VII.

**H. Complaints About DEAC Evaluators, Commissioners, and Staff:** The Board of Directors is responsible for handling complaints against DEAC evaluators, Commissioners, and/or staff for alleged violations of DEAC's standards, policies, or code of conduct. Any member of the Board who is the subject of or implicated by the allegations in the complaint must recuse from all discussions, deliberations and decision-making with respect to any such complaint. The process followed for such complaints is as follows:

1. After the receipt of the complaint by DEAC, all materials related to the complaint are forwarded to the Chair of the Executive Committee (unless the complaint is about the chair). If the complaint is about the Chair, the complaint and all materials are forwarded to the Vice Chair.

2. After the receipt of the complaint, the Chair or Vice Chair sends a letter to the

complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and explaining the process the DEAC will follow in investigating the complaint. The Chair or Vice Chair also forwards a copy of the complaint to the person(s) named in the complaint. The identity of the complainant(s) may be withheld in the Chair's or Vice Chair's sole discretion. The Chair or Vice Chair may also elect, in their discretion, to send only a summary of the allegations in the complaint rather than the actual complaint. The person(s) named in the complaint is asked to respond to the allegations (or summary of the allegations) in writing within **30 days**.

3. The Chair or Vice Chair also decides whether any additional information is needed from the complainant or regarding the subject of the complaint, before the complaint can be considered. If so, the Chair or Vice Chair requests that DEAC obtain the information within **30** days. If the requested information is not received within the specified time frame, the Chair or Vice Chair may determine that there is insufficient information to pursue the complaint; any such determination will be communicated to the complainant. If the requested information is not received from the subject of the complaint, the matter will be referred to the Commission for further action. DEAC employees may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. DEAC consultants, contractors and volunteers may, as applicable, have their contracts terminated and/or their names removed from the pool of potential volunteers retained by DEAC in connection with the accreditation process. Directors and Commissioners may be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including removal from office.

4. Within **30** days of receipt of all the information pertaining to the complaint, including the original complaint and any additional information, provided by the Complainant and/or the subject(s) of the Complaint and/or otherwise assembled by DEAC staff (such materials, as they may be supplemented or revised from time to time, the "complaint file"), the Chair or Vice Chair convenes a conference call of the Executive Committee to review the complaint.

5. After review of the complaint file the Executive Committee summarizes its findings and presents them to the full Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting, unless an earlier special meeting is requested by the Executive Committee in its sole discretion. The Commission will then consider the complaint file, together with the analysis and recommendations of the Executive Committee. The Commission may at that point reach a final decision with respect to the resolution of the complaint or may elect to defer that decision if it believes more information is required in order to reach a fully considered and fair decision. If the Commission requires additional information, it will work with DEAC staff to use good faith efforts to collect such information within **30 days**. Both the complainant and the subject of the Complaint will be kept informed of the Commission's actions.

6. If the Commission determines that there has been a violation of DEAC standards,

policies, or code of conduct by a DEAC employee or contractor, director, evaluator or other affiliated person, the Commission will take such disciplinary action as it deems appropriate, up to and including termination. DEAC consultants, contractors and volunteers may, as applicable, have their contracts terminated and/or their names removed from the pool of potential volunteers retained by DEAC in connection with the accreditation process. Directors and Commissioners may be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including removal from office. The Commission may also refer the complaint to third parties for further action.

7. The Chair or Vice Chair notifies the person named in the complaint of the Board's decision within **30** days.

8. The Chair or Vice Chair notifies the complainant of the final disposition of the complaint within **30** days after such disposition has been determined by the Board.

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

## XXIII. Reviewing, Adopting, and Circulating Changes to the Accreditation Handbook

**A.** The Commission has the power and responsibility to review, establish, and circulate its standards and procedures for evaluation and accreditation of distance education institutions.

**B. Origin of Accreditation Standards and Procedures:** The Commission considers recommendations from any source and in any manner or form when reviewing its accreditation standards and procedures. The following is a list of some sources of recommendations for new or amended accreditation standards and procedures:

1. **Commission:** The Commission reviews its accreditation standards and procedures and any comments received at every meeting.

2. **DEAC Staff:** The DEAC staff make recommendations and suggestions to the Commission regarding any accreditation standards or procedures that it believes need to be strengthened.

3. **Standards Committee:** The Standards Committee, from time to time, makes recommendations to the Commission to refine and/or revise standards to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of students and member institutions.

4. **DEAC Evaluators and Subject Specialists:** All DEAC evaluators and subject specialists are surveyed after each review and on-site visit to seek recommendations for clarifying accreditation standards and improving procedures.

5. **State Regulators:** DEAC invites a representative from the state regulator's office where the institution is located to observe on-site visits and provide feedback on DEAC accreditation standards and procedures.

6. **Government and Nongovernmental Agencies:** Input and changes from the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) inform revisions to DEAC accreditation standards and procedures.

7. **Educators, Faculty, and Administrators:** Education industry professionals provide recommendations for revisions to DEAC accreditation standards and improvements to procedures based on best practices.

8. **Consumer Groups:** DEAC periodically interacts with consumer protection groups (e.g., Better Business Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) to seek suggestions for improvement of accreditation standards and procedures.

9. **Applicant and Accredited Institutions:** Each applicant and member institution is encouraged to provide thoughtful feedback and suggestions for clarification and revision of DEAC accreditation standards and procedures for continuous improvement.

10. **Third-Party Review:** DEAC retains an independent organization to review its accreditation standards and procedures and to conduct rigorous validity and reliability surveys.

11. **Students and the General Public:** DEAC seeks input and feedback from students through surveys. Student complaints and correspondence are responded to by DEAC staff and used during reviews of accreditation standards and procedures.

**C. Systematic Program Review:** DEAC seeks input and collects data from its communities of interest, including internal and external constituencies. DEAC uses these data when evaluating and drafting changes to its accreditation standards and procedures. DEAC performs a systematic review of its accreditation standards and procedures using comments, recommendations, and data collected from various sources. Elements of the systematic review process include the following:

1. Every five years, DEAC engages an independent, third-party organization to survey accredited institutions, DEAC evaluators (e.g., faculty from appropriately accredited institutions recognized by the U.S. Department of Education), subject specialists, and students (e.g., active, graduates, inactive, and withdrawn) on the validity and reliability of DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures. These surveys focus on the adequacy and relevance of the accreditation standards and their effectiveness in enabling DEAC to evaluate the quality of distance education. The third-party

organization evaluates DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures individually and as a whole.

2. The DEAC Board Standards Committee collects feedback from member institutions and other interested constituencies as part of the review process. The committee may create as special task forces to address the evaluation of the information and determine whether current accreditation standards or procedures need revision. The Standards Committee meets twice a year at the DEAC Annual Conference and Fall Workshop and at such other times as may be requested by DEAC and/or the Commission.

3. DEAC staff propose revisions to accreditation standards and procedures to ensure continued compliance with recognition criteria from the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

4. Interested constituencies, institutions, and organizations are continuously encouraged to submit comments and recommendations for revision of current accreditation standards and procedures. Comments and recommendations are sent to DEAC's executive director.

**D. Processes and Procedures for Adoption of Changes to the *Accreditation Handbook*:** The following process is followed for adopting revisions to DEAC's accreditation standards and procedures in the *Accreditation Handbook.*

1. All recommendations for revisions to current accreditation standards and procedures are collected by DEAC staff and submitted to the Standards Subcommittee for initial review. The Standards Subcommittee proposes revised language or develops new accreditation standards or procedures based on the feedback received. Once the Standards Subcommittee reviews the proposed language, it is forwarded to the Commission for review. The Commission considers the recommendations and reviews the proposed language and either approves the changes as proposed or makes revisions and then approves the revised language.

2. Upon Commission approval of the revised accreditation standards or procedures, the proposed language is sent to member institutions, the public, and other stakeholders for comment. Comments are solicited within an established time frame (usually 30 days). A notice is posted on DEAC's website to allow the general public to review and comment on the proposed changes. DEAC encourages all internal and external communities of interest, including those that have made their interest known, to comment on any proposed changes.

3. The Commission reviews and carefully considers all comments before making a final decision. The Commission can adopt accreditation standards and procedures as proposed, adopt with changes or modifications, defer action pending further study

and consideration, or reject the proposed changes outright. Once changes to accreditation standards or procedures are finalized, the revised standards are published as provided under Section E below. Institutions are provided a reasonable period in which with any new standard or procedure when appropriate.

4. If exigent circumstances exist that necessitate a material change to DEAC accreditation standards or procedures to become final and effective immediately, the Commission publishes the change in final form without regard to the notice and comment procedures stated in II.6. Interested parties are provided an opportunity to comment on the change as soon as practicable after publication. Examples of exigent changes which might require such immediate action include, but are not limited to: (a) immediate changes to DEAC policies, procedures and standards required by other accrediting organizations; (b) legal or regulatory changes with effective dates that do not support the standard comment period; and(c) external causes (such as pandemics infrastructure/communication issues, or domestic/international conflicts).

5. Non-substantive changes to DEAC's standards, policies and procedures may be adopted by the Commission without a notice or comment period. However, they are published by DEAC in accordance with subsection E below. Non- substantive changes include, by way of example, changes which are intended (i) to clarify and/or provide greater detail with respect to existing provisions, (ii) to improve readability, (iii) to conform terminology, and (iv) to update names, addresses and administrative information.

**E. Circulation of Accreditation Standards and Procedures:** DEAC circulates the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures following the processes below:

1. New or revised accreditation standards or procedures are posted on DEAC's website and published in DEAC publications that are sent to all internal and external constituencies.

2. The following DEAC publications are updated to include the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.

3. The *Accreditation Handbook* is made available on the DEAC website. Printed copies are made available upon request.

4. DEAC updates its online training manuals and courses with new or revised accreditation standards or procedures.

5. DEAC staff review the new or revised accreditation standards or procedures with on-site evaluators before each on-site visit.

# Part Three: Accreditation Standards

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

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

## Standard I: Mission

**Description**

The mission defines the institution's purpose, guiding its actions and decisions while providing stakeholders with a clear sense of the institution's direction and identity within the distance education community.

**Core Components**

**A. Description of the Mission**

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

**B. Review and Publication of the Mission**

The institution's administrative and academic leadership team, as well as representative members of the institution's faculty, shall review the mission on a regular basis to determine whether the mission should be amended and how the institution is performing against the objectives set by its mission statement. The published mission statement is readily accessible to students, faculty, staff, other stakeholders, and the public.

## Standard II: Governance

**Description**
The governance structure of the institution provides sufficient academic and administrative leadership, oversight, capability, and stability to ensure the efficient and effective use of institutional resources consistent with the institution's mission.

**Core Components**

**A. Owners, Governing Board Members, Officials, and Administrators**
The institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess appropriate qualifications and experience for their positions. The owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators are knowledgeable and experienced in one or more aspects of education administration, finance, and the design and delivery of academic programs and related student services within a distance learning model. 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 appropriate to their position and have the ability to oversee institutional operations consistent with the institution's mission and program offerings.

**B. Reputation of Institution, Owners, Governing Board Members, Administrators, and Other Officials**
The institution and its owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations, a record of integrity, and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The institution'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 mistreatment of consumers. The institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators shall comply with the institution's policies and procedures governing conflicts of interest and other applicable rules of conduct.

**C. Succession Plan**
The institution has a written plan that describes the process that it follows to sustain operations in the event a leadership succession is necessary. The plan identifies specific people, committees, or boards responsible for carrying out 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 the plan on an annual basis and revises as needed.

**D. Maintaining Eligibility for Accreditation**
The institution maintains its eligibility for accreditation and is properly licensed, authorized, exempted, or approved by all applicable state education institutional authorizations (or their equivalent for non-U.S. institutions). Exemptions from state law

are supported by state-issued documentation or by statutory language for that jurisdiction.

## Standard III: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

**Description**
The institution monitors achievement of its mission, conducts strategic planning, and evaluates its institutional effectiveness.

**Core Components**

**A. Mission Achievement**
The institution plans and implements comprehensive processes with clearly defined metrics and criteria to monitor effectiveness of all aspects of the institution's operations against the institution's mission and any initiatives identified in the strategic plan. The institution shares appropriate information from the data gathered with relevant stakeholder groups.

**B. Strategic Planning**
The institution implements a strategic plan utilizing a systematic process for the achievement of goals that support its mission. The institution's planning processes involve all areas of the institution's operations in developing strategic initiatives and goals by evaluating external and internal trends. Data is used to identify areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement, development, and growth. The plan helps institutions set priorities, manage resources, and set goals for future performance.

The strategic plan addresses, at a minimum, finances, academics, technology, admissions, marketing, personnel, and institutional sustainability and includes measurable action plans that lead to mission achievement. The plan identifies the individuals responsible, timelines for completion, and the financial resources required. The institution reviews the strategic plan at least annually and reports achievement of progress to its stakeholders.

**C. Institutional Effectiveness**
The institution develops a plan and implements a systematic and ongoing process to evaluate the content and delivery of its educational programs, its provision of student support services, and the effectiveness of its supporting infrastructure and staff operations. The institution engages in sound research practices; collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative evidence about its effectiveness; and develops and implements action plans that are used to improve operations, academic achievement, educational technologies, and student services.

## Standard IV: Academic Achievement

**Description**
Academic achievement is evaluated through assessment of student learning outcomes; student outcomes measures; and the sentiments of students, alumni, and employers.

**Core Components**

**A. Student Learning Outcomes**
Student learning outcomes are clearly defined, simply stated, and measurable and define success for students who are reasonably capable of completing the educational offering.

**B. Direct Measures**
The institution evaluates student achievement using student outcome indicators (e.g., completion rates) and other measures that it determines to be appropriate relative to its mission and educational offerings, including post-completion measures. The institution maintains systematic and ongoing processes for assessing student achievement, analyzes aggregated and disaggregated 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. Data on student achievement is collected on a continuous basis and evaluated annually.

**C. Indirect Measures**
The institution systematically seeks student, alumni, and employment community input to evaluate and improve curricula, instructional materials, method of delivery, and student services. The institution regularly collects evidence that currently enrolled students are satisfied with the administrative, educational, and support services provided.

## Standard V: Academic Program Requirements

**Description**
Program offerings are aligned with the institution's mission. Program requirements are clearly stated and consistent with accepted expectations for level and content at peer institutions.

**Core Components**

**A. General Program Requirements**
The institution's programs are aligned with its mission. Program content, student learning outcomes, and standards of student performance are appropriate to the academic discipline and level of the credential conferred. Entry and completion requirements for each program are clearly defined and consistent with commonly

accepted program expectations for awarding the credential. Program length for degree programs must adhere to the following minimum standards:

1. Associate degree – minimum 60 semester hours or equivalent.
2. Applied bachelor's degree – minimum 90 semester hours or equivalent.
3. Bachelor's degree – minimum 120 semester hours or equivalent.
4. Master's degree – minimum 30 semester hours or equivalent beyond the bachelor's degree.
5. First Professional degree (at any level) – minimum 50 semester hours or equivalent beyond the bachelor's degree.
6. Applied doctorate – minimum 48 semester hours or equivalent beyond the master's degree.
7. Research doctorate – minimum 60 semester hours or equivalent beyond the master's degree.

**B. General Education Requirements for Undergraduate Degrees**

Institutions set clear expectations regarding general education requirements for undergraduate programs consistent with the level of education and academic discipline. General education content for undergraduate programs conveys broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students that equip them for lifelong learning. General education must include outcomes related to written and oral communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, critical thinking, natural and physical sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and the humanities.

**C. Alternative Program Structures**

Institutions may offer alternative program structures appropriate to the institution's mission. Such program structures may include direct assessment (competency-based) programs, joint degrees, dual degrees, double majors, and advanced standing degree enrollment as defined in the glossary. Alternative degree plans must meet all student learning outcomes and DEAC's standards of accreditation, including the requirement that the majority of each program be offered through distance education.

**D. Program Advisory Council(s)**

The institution maintains an Advisory Council of individuals external to the institution with expertise for each major group of programs or major subject matter disciplines it offers to inform curricular development decisions and align program content to current practices. Institutional personnel may participate as liaisons to Advisory Councils.

## Standard VI: Curriculum Development

**Description**

The institution develops clear, up-to-date, and well-organized curricula for each program. Curricula are sufficiently comprehensive for students to achieve the stated program outcomes. Curricular organization and content are supported by reliable research and practice and reflect

sound principles of learning, grounded in distance education instructional design principles. Curricula development processes are codified in the institution's Curriculum Development Guide. Curricula review is included in the institution's program review processes.

**Core Components**

**A. Program Curricula Development**

Institutions have a documented process for curriculum development that clearly articulates the principles of learning and pedagogical foundations used to frame the program. The institution's curricula are supported by reliable research and align with commonly accepted educational practices within the fields of practice. Qualified faculty and academic leadership hold the primary responsibility for all program content and instructional design and supervise staff, third-party providers, or consultants used in curricula development. Program curricula are reviewed on a periodic basis by academic leadership, program leadership, program faculty, and the Program Advisory Council. The review integrates program performance data collected on an annual basis with respect to student progression; student learning outcomes; faculty and student feedback; and content currency, accuracy, and comprehensiveness.

**B. Instructional Design and Materials**

All curricula and instructional materials are designed for the program's distance learning delivery modality by qualified individuals and grounded in instructional design principles. Instructional design considers how students learn, the nature and accessibility of the materials, and methods deemed most effective to help students learn in specific delivery modalities. Courses integrate access to learning materials and resources. Courses include instructions and suggestions on how to study and how to use the instructional materials to learn effectively and efficiently. Syllabi are aligned with course content and are structured to direct course learning experiences and activities.

**C. Academic Units of Measurement**

The institution documents policies and procedures used to define and calculate the chosen academic unit of measurement. The framework for academic units must be supported by research and consistent with the program learning outcomes. Academic units are measured by credit hours or competencies. Academic unit measurements for all delivery modalities and program types must clearly show that each program is delivered with at least 51 percent distance education. 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. If academic units are measured in 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.

**D. Credit Hour Definition**

Semester and quarter credit 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 credit or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit. One credit/semester hour is 15 hours of academic engagement and 30 hours of preparation. One quarter hour credit is 10 hours of academic engagement and 20 hours of preparation.

## Standard VII: Learning Materials, Resources, and Research Support

**Description**

Learning materials and resources are aligned to the delivery modality, content area, and degree level and complement the teaching and curricula to support students' ability to achieve the stated program outcomes. The institution provides faculty and students with access to all relevant learning resources, materials, or related services appropriate for the achievement of course learning outcomes.

**Core Components**

**A. General Learning Resources**

Institutional learning resources include general materials or resources that are available to students outside individual class environments. Learning materials and resources are designed to adequately support educational offerings in meeting learning outcomes.

**B. Course-Level Learning Resources**

In-course learning resources for faculty and students are available and appropriate to the level and content of the course within the scope of the program offering. Program designers and faculty use effective teaching aids and learning resources, including educational media and supplemental instructional aids, when delivering courses and teaching students. The institution provides faculty and students with access to all relevant learning resources, materials, or related services that are appropriate for the achievement of course learning outcomes.

**C. Library and Research Support**

Staff or contracted librarians must support the learning, teaching, and research functions of institutions, as well as provide overall support to the institution's curriculum as applicable to the level and content of the institution's academic programs. A process is in place to select, acquire, organize, and maintain institutional learning materials and resources for each program.

**D. Evaluation, Review, and Revision**

The quality, adequacy, currency, and accuracy of institutional learning resources, technologies, library resources, and in-course learning resources for each program are reviewed and evaluated at least annually. The review is conducted by institutional

academic leadership and program leadership, with input from faculty and students. The process and applicable resources are revised as appropriate, based on each review.

## Standard VIII: Academic Delivery

**Description**

As a provider of distance education, the institution uses mission-aligned and readily accessible technology to optimize interaction between and among faculty and students and effectively support instructional and educational services. Students, faculty, and practitioners involved in instructional activities receive training and support in the technology. Existing academic technologies are periodically reviewed for sufficiency and potential areas of improvement. The institution also stays current with respect to new and emerging technologies and/or technological trends. Prospective students are informed of the institution's minimum technology requirements before admission.

**Core Components**

**A. Curricula Delivery**

All curricula and instructional materials are developed in alignment with the institution's mission and delivery modality. Regardless of methodology, delivery supports interactions with faculty in synchronous or asynchronous learning.

**B. Supporting Academic Technologies**

The institution uses technology appropriate to its modality and institutional context to support the delivery of its educational programs. This includes not only technology that delivers course materials and content, but also technology that (1) supports communications between students and faculty; (2) monitors student progress and achievement; (3) provides access to other academic resources, such as online libraries and third-party programs; (4) offers readily accessible channels for students to communicate questions, complaints, and concerns to applicable faculty or institutional staff; (5) protects the integrity of academic programs, testing, student work, and student communications; and (6) otherwise supports the collection of data necessary for the institution to evaluate its operations and performance.

## Standard IX: Academic Leadership and Staffing

**Description**

The institution models effective leadership and a shared purpose by ensuring that qualified individuals are serving in all academic roles. The institution is responsible for implementing and maintaining sufficient administrative staff and infrastructure to support the effective performance of its academic leadership and faculty. This includes ensuring access by academic leadership and faculty to academic and professional resources sufficient to allow them to stay current in their field.

**Core Components**

**A. Academic Leadership**

The institution provides academically qualified and experienced leadership to direct and oversee the effective delivery of its educational offerings using distance learning models. Academic leadership is responsible for the quality of program and student outcomes, as well as for the selection, training, continued quality, and development of faculty.

**B. Faculty Qualifications**

1. The institution provides the appropriate number of qualified faculty to achieve program and course outcomes and provide instruction. The institution maintains faculty résumés, official transcripts, and copies of applicable licenses or credentials on file.

2. Faculty teaching in high school programs are appropriately credentialed to teach the subject and level of the courses leading to a high school diploma.

3. Faculty teaching technical courses have practical experience in the field and possess current licenses/certifications as applicable.

4. Faculty teaching occupational/technical associate degrees possess credentials, evidence of academic preparation, practical experience, and licensure or certifications that are appropriate to the subject field and consistent with accepted postsecondary education practices in the subject field.

5. Faculty teaching in undergraduate academic degree programs possess a degree at least one level above that of the program they are teaching and demonstrate expertise in the subject field they are teaching.

6. Faculty teaching in master's degree programs possess a doctoral or terminal degree and demonstrate expertise in the subject field they are teaching.

7. Faculty teaching in doctoral degree/first professional degree programs possess a doctoral degree/first professional degree in a related subject field.

8. Faculty teaching general education possess a master's degree in the field or a master's degree and 18 semester hours of education in the general education subject area.

9. All faculty credentials are awarded by an appropriately accredited institution.

10. Faculty may be assigned, in limited and exceptional cases, to teach at the undergraduate or master's level by documented equivalency consisting of a demonstrated depth and breadth of experience in the content area. An institution that uses experiential equivalency in lieu of the required degree qualifications for faculty and other academic positions must establish and adhere to a clearly stated policy which authorizes the use of experiential equivalency only in exceptional cases and only where equivalency is demonstrated pursuant to published and objective criteria. In such cases, the institution implements
    a. a well-defined policy, with processes and procedures to evaluate the need for and assignment of faculty by equivalency; and
    b. procedures that ensure that adequate oversight of teaching and learning is provided by individuals who possess degree qualifications in accordance with faculty qualifications listed in IX.B.4-6 and 8 above.

**C. Faculty Training**

All faculty must be trained in or have demonstrated experience with the principles of distance learning pedagogy. In addition, faculty shall be regularly trained in institutional policies, existing and emerging instructional approaches and techniques, and the use of instructional technology and academic resources. Faculty are evaluated on a regular basis for effectiveness in teaching and responsiveness to student needs.

**D. Professional Development and Scholarship**

Faculty and academic staff are provided professional development and support for scholarly pursuits aligned to the institution's mission and level of programs offered.

## Standard X: Academic Policies

**Description**

The institution establishes, publishes, and enforces academic policies and procedures to ensure faculty and student integrity and academic honesty, as well as compliance with applicable laws in research activities. The institution also publishes clear criteria for admissions, transfer credit, prior learning assessment, and satisfactory academic progress. These criteria are readily accessible by current and prospective students, as well as by the general public.

**Core Components**

**A. Admissions Criteria**

The institution's admissions criteria align with its mission, program levels, and targeted student population. The admissions criteria are intended to ensure the admission of students who can reasonably be expected to successfully complete the stated educational offerings. Exceptions to admissions criteria are limited and require documentation of a clear and justifiable rationale for the exception.

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

2. Undergraduate Degrees
   Applicants possess a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent at the time of admission (e.g., high school diploma or general educational development tests [GED]).

3. Master's Degrees
   Applicants possess a bachelor's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution.

4. First Professional Degrees
   Applicants possess a bachelor's or master's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution.

5. Professional Doctoral Degrees
   Applicants possess a bachelor's or master's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution and relevant academic experience. The institution verifies that applicants have completed 30 graduate-level credit hours prior to admission.

6. Research Doctoral Degrees
   Applicants possess a bachelor's or master's degree earned from an appropriately accredited institution and relevant academic experience. The institution verifies that applicants have completed 30 graduate-level credit hours prior to admission.

7. Dual Degrees
   Institutions demonstrate that admissions criteria meet commonly accepted practices and ensure that students are adequately prepared to be successful in the educational offering.

**B. Transfer Credit**

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 may appeal transfer credit decisions using published procedures. The institution clearly discloses that the transfer of institutional credits to other institutions is at the discretion of the other institution.

**C. Prior Learning Assessment**

Credit may be awarded for demonstrated learning appropriate for the level, subject, and amount of credit awarded based on the student's prior professional/military experience, training, credit recommendation services, or other educational experiences

outside of traditional academic learning consistent with CAEL's Ten Standards for Assessing Learning (Available in Part IV, Appendix XV, DEAC *Accreditation Handbook*). The institution must publish its prior learning assessment policy in its catalog. Institutions maintain official documentation of the evidence of prior learning and the rationale of the instances of awarding credit for prior learning.

**D. Student Integrity and Academic Honesty**

The institution publishes clear, specific policies related to student integrity and academic honesty. Students acknowledge in writing their receipt and review of the policies prior to beginning their first course. The institution affirms that the student who takes an assessment is the same person who enrolled in the program. The institution implements procedures to ensure that assessments will reflect a student's own knowledge and competence in accordance with stated learning outcomes.

**E. Grading Polices**

Student academic performance is measured using published grading policies that include prompt return of accurately and consistently graded assessments that are supervised by a qualified faculty member. The institution publishes its grade scale system, policy for course extension, and information on incomplete grades.

**F. Satisfactory Academic Progress**

The institution implements and consistently applies a satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policy and discloses this policy to students. Criteria for measuring satisfactory academic progress include qualitative and quantitative standards used for evaluation of student progress. The institution takes appropriate action if students do not meet the institution's minimum standards of progress. Students are informed of their academic progress and standing in the program at regular intervals throughout their enrollment.

**G. Institutional Review Board**

Any institution that has students or faculty engage in research involving human subjects implements an institutional review board (IRB). The IRB ensures that such research studies comply with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations under 45 CFR Part 56 and other applicable regulations, meets commonly accepted ethical standards, follows institutional policy, and adequately protects research participants. The IRB is responsible for approving and providing oversight on all research activities involving human subjects conducted by students, faculty, and other academic support personnel.

## Standard XI: Recruitment and Enrollment

**Description**

The institution adheres to applicable state, federal, and international law, as well as DEAC's Code of Ethics, in its recruitment efforts. Enrollment agreements comply with DEAC's

Enrollment Agreements Disclosures Checklist. Scholarships and discounts conform to DEAC definitions and are applied consistently.

**Core Components**

**A. Student Recruitment**

The institution demonstrates that ethical processes and procedures are followed throughout the recruitment of prospective students. The qualifications and experience of the institution's recruitment personnel are aligned to identified roles and responsibilities. Recruitment personnel are trained in the tasks and expectations of their positions. Authorized recruitment personnel are provided with appropriate materials to perform their tasks and are routinely monitored to ensure compliance with laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates, the DEAC Code of Ethics, and institutional policy. The institution takes full responsibility for the actions of its recruitment personnel, whether internal or third party.

**B. Verification of Student Identity**

Student identity verification processes begin during the enrollment and onboarding of students and continue with respect to the student's enrollment in subsequent programs/classes.

**C. Compulsory Age**

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

**D. Enrollment Agreements**

The institution's enrollment agreements/documents are in the language of instruction and clearly identify the educational offering and the credential awarded. The agreements inform applicants of the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of both the student and the institution prior to applicant signature. The institution complies with the DEAC Enrollment Agreements Disclosures Checklist.

**E. Financial Disclosures**

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

**F. Scholarships**

Scholarships are awarded either for merit or based on need. Merit-based scholarships must be based on definable achievement at the time of enrollment or within the

program of study. Merit-based scholarships are evaluated by qualified individuals using an institution-approved rubric. Need-based scholarships must be based on a discernable and consistent economic standard. Scholarships must indicate the actual reduction in the costs that would otherwise be charged by the institution.

**G. Discounts**

Tuition reductions other than scholarships are considered discounts. Discounts are permitted for well-defined groups, for specific and bona fide purposes, or for a specified period. Discounts must indicate the actual reduction in the costs that would otherwise be charged by the institution.

**H. Admission Process**

The institution verifies that all admissions requirements are met prior to admission and collects appropriate evidence, such as official transcripts and English language proficiency documentation, to support eligibility. English language proficiency is verified for applicants whose native language is not English and who have not earned a degree from an appropriately accredited institution where English is the principal language of instruction. Such verification procedures align with DEAC's guidance on English Language Proficiency Assessment located in Appendix IX. The institution documents the basis for any denial of admission. Official transcripts, if required for admission, must be received within a defined enrollment period not to exceed 12 semester credit hours. Students who do not submit required official transcripts within the prescribed period are administratively withdrawn.

## Standard XII: Student Support Services

**Description**

The institution's policies, procedures, and internal systems optimize interaction between the institution and students and actively promote student-faculty interactions, program completion, and educational success. The institution uses technology effectively to support such policies, procedures, and systems, including ensuring that student-facing applications are user friendly and accessible through the institution's website. The institution also provides staffing to adequately support the foregoing policies, procedures, and systems and respond to student inquiries, educational needs, and individual differences to facilitate program completion and educational success.

**Core Components**

**A. Student Inquiries and Requests for Assistance**

The institution must provide readily accessible methods through which students can submit inquiries, report issues or concerns (whether or not filing a formal complaint), request assistance, or otherwise communicate with institution faculty and/or staff. The institution responds promptly and thoroughly to all student inquiries.

**B. Individual Differences**

Academic advising and instructional support are readily available to assist students in achieving institutional and program requirements, program outcomes, course learning outcomes, and educational goals as required by laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates.

**C. Student Support**

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

## Standard XIII: Fair Practices

**Description**

The institution's policies promote transparency, fairness, and respect for privacy and confidentiality. The institution's cancellation and refund policies must be fair, equitable, clear, and unambiguous.

**Core Components**

**A. Confidentiality and Privacy**

The institution's policies, procedures, and systems protect student confidentiality and privacy as required by laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates.

**B. Complaint Procedures**

1. The institution has policies and procedures for receiving, responding to, and addressing student complaints. The policies and procedures should embody the principles of fairness, responsiveness, respect, due process, and proportionality. DEAC requires institutions to have written complaint policies and procedures for the purposes of receiving, responding to, addressing, and resolving complaints made by students, faculty, administrators, or any party, including one who has good reason to believe that an institution is not in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards.

2. At a minimum, the institution's policy instructs students how to file a complaint or grievance and the maximum time for resolution. The institution's complaint policy and procedures are available to all students. The institution defines what it reasonably considers to be a student complaint.

3. The institution reviews in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives from students. When the complaint concerns a faculty member or administrator, the institution may not complete its review and make a final decision regarding a complaint unless, and in accordance with its published procedures, it ensures that the faculty member or administrator has sufficient opportunity to

provide a response to the complaint. The institution takes any follow-up action, including enforcement action if necessary, based on the results of its review.

4. The institution's complaint policy states how complaints can be filed with state agencies and with its accrediting organization.

5. The institution will retain the complete files for all complaints that may be filed against the institution, its faculty, staff, students, or other associated parties either for five years from the filing of the complaint or until the completion of the institution's next cycle of evaluation for accreditation, whichever is longer.

**C. Cancellations and Withdrawals**

Institutions maintain, publish, and consistently apply fair and equitable cancellation and withdrawal policies that meet or exceed the requirements of state and federal regulators, DEAC, and such other industry regulators as may have jurisdiction over one or more of the institution's programs. Students may notify the institution of cancellation or withdrawal in any manner the institution deems appropriate so long as the method or methods available are reasonable and in compliance with applicable state and federal requirements. Policies pursuant to when an institution may administratively withdraw a student or cancel their enrollment are published and readily accessible for review by the student.

1. A student shall have no less than five calendar days following their executing the enrollment agreement or other contractual document in which to cancel the agreement and/or contract and receive a full refund of any monies paid to the institution.

2. Students are notified promptly if they are administratively withdrawn for non-compliance with attendance or other administrative policy.

**D. Refunds**

Institutions must implement fair and equitable refund policies that meet or exceed the requirements of their government regulators, including consumer rights and protection policies. In the absence of such requirements, the institution follows DEAC's refund policy requirements in Appendix XIV. Refund policies include procedures for students who enroll but do not start coursework and students failing to persist or make satisfactory academic progress. Refund policies must be clearly stated and transparently disclosed, including the use of sample calculations. Any money due to a student must be refunded within 30 days of the student's notice of cancellation or withdrawal; refunds due to funding agencies must be returned in compliance with their respective requirements.

**E. Performance Disclosures**

The institution routinely discloses on its website reliable, current, and accurate information on its performance, including student achievement, as well as any other requirements in accordance with state, federal, and other relevant regulatory agencies and in accordance with DEAC's student achievement disclosure format.

**F. Advertising and Promotion**

The institution conforms to ethical practices in all advertising and promotion to prospective students. The institution's processes and procedures ensure that all advertisements, website content, and other marketing collateral is truthful, accurate, and clearly stated. The institution complies with DEAC's Catalog Disclosures Checklist and DEAC's Website Disclosures Checklist.

**G. Institution and Course Accredited-Status Recognition**

The institution accurately discloses its accredited status and uses the official DEAC accreditation logo and/or statement of accreditation when publishing its accreditation status in advertisements and promotional materials on its website and in social media. DEAC's name, address, telephone number, and web address are published in the institution's catalog. Institutions publish a statement of accreditation only as follows:

- Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- DEAC Accredited

**H. Truth in Lending**

The institution complies with all applicable Truth in Lending Act (TILA) requirements, including those under Regulation Z, and state requirements for retail installment agreements.

## Standard XIV: Finance

**Description**

The institution's financial policies, processes, and procedures are sufficient to ensure sound financial practices, fiscal management, and financial sustainability and stability. The institution's budgeting process is aligned with the strategic plan. Budgeting processes and financial reporting conform to best practice. The institution's financial position is sufficient to sustain operations and meet its obligations. Financial operations are overseen by qualified and experienced personnel. Collections processes are monitored and respect the rights and interests of students.

**Core Components**

**A. Financial Practices**

The institution provides on an annual basis complete, comparative financial statements covering its two most recent fiscal years' financial statements that are audited and

prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) in the United States of America or the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). In the event the operations of the institution are supported in whole or in part by a parent company or a third party, the Commission may require audited financial statements from the parent or third party to demonstrate that the entity possesses sufficient financial resources to provide the institution continued financial sustainability. If the institution's financial performance is included within the parent corporation's statements, a supplemental schedule for the individual institution is appended to the parent statement, and inter-company transactions are clearly identified and defined. 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 maintains adequate administrative staff and other resources to operate effectively within fiscal and budgeting constraints, consistent with its representations of the scope and quality of its educational offerings as guided by its mission statement and strategic plan. Any risk that exists is adequately monitored, manageable, and insured. The institution has adequate administrative resources for effective operations, and at least one person is qualified and able to prepare accurate financial reports in a timely manner. Documentation protocols and controls are in place to assure that finances are properly managed, monitored, and protected.

**C. Financial Stability and Sustainability**

Financial statements must reflect that the institution has sufficient resources to meet the institution's financial obligations to provide quality instruction and service to its students for the full period of each student's enrollment, consistent with the institution's program representations.

**D. Financial Reporting**

Annual financial statements are prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles in the United States of America, often referred to as "GAAP", including the accrual method of accounting. An independent certified public accountant (CPA) audit report accompanies these statements. At its discretion, the Commission may require additional financial reporting from the institution.

**E. Collections**

Collection procedures used by the institution or third parties reflect sound and ethical business practices.

## Standard XV: Facilities and Records Maintenance

**Description**

The institution has and maintains facilities, equipment, technology, and supplies sufficient to support its operations in compliance with DEAC accreditation standards and consistent with the institution's mission statement and published descriptions of academic programs, program outcomes, and student services. Institutions provide adequate physical and electronic security for student, financial, and administrative records. The physical location and/or virtual workspace infrastructure are adequate to sustain current operations.

**Core Components**

**A. Records Protection**

The institution's financial and administrative records, as well as students' financial, educational, and personal information, are securely and confidentially maintained in accordance with laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates and with professional requirements.

**B. Record Retention**

The institution's financial, administrative, and student educational records are retained in accordance with laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates. The institution implements a comprehensive document retention policy. Transcripts are readily accessible and are maintained permanently in either print or digital form.

**C. Facilities, Equipment, and Supplies**

The institution's primary facility is located in a professional, institution-branded space authorized by local authorities for mixed use or commercial use. The institution maintains a written facilities plan and budget allocations to maintain facilities, equipment, and supplies to support its educational offerings, student support services, and administrative operations on a sustainable basis. Buildings, workspaces, and equipment comply with local fire, building, health, and safety regulations.

**D. Protection of Physical Sites and Virtual Infrastructure**

The institution's physical location(s) and virtual infrastructure are adequate to secure financial, administrative, and student educational records; are reasonably accessible; and are adequately protected in accordance with laws applicable to the jurisdiction(s) in which the institution operates. An adequate disaster response and recovery plan is in place that includes mitigation of risks, i.e., at a minimum, the ability to sustain and support continuing academic operations, the protection of student information consistent with applicable law, and the mitigation of other risks presented by physical, environmental, cybersecurity, force majeure, and other reasonably foreseeable threats.

**E. In-Residence Program Component**

The institution provides appropriate facilities for students participating in in-residence learning experiences. The facilities comply with all state and federal requirements. The institution maintains adequate insurance to protect students, faculty, and staff while participating in in-residence learning.

# Part Four: Appendices

## I. Conflict of Interest Policy

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

### A. Conflict of Interest Defined

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

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

For further purposes of the policy, the following circumstances *for Institutional Commissioners only* shall be deemed to create a conflict of interest:

- Currently employed with a DEAC institution that initiates a request for change in institutional accrediting agency
- or publicly announces intent to withdraw from DEAC accreditation;

Other situations may create the appearance of a conflict or present a duality of interests *for Commissioners only* in connection with a person who has influence over the activities or finances of the DEAC. Below are three examples, but not inclusive of

all examples:

- Addition of a second institutional accrediting agency with the Department of Education;
- Enters a formal relationship (e.g., membership) with a second institutional accrediting agency;
- Currently serving on a board, advisory council, or committee of a second institutional accrediting agency.

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

**B. Gifts, Gratuities, and Entertainment**

Commissioners, DEAC employees, and evaluators will not accept gifts, entertainment, or other favors from DEAC accredited or applicant institutions. individuals or entities. This does not apply to institution branded items of nominal value.

1. **Definitions**

   In this policy, the following terms are defined as:

   a. A "conflict of interest" is any circumstance described in part A of this policy.

   b. An "interested person" is any person serving as commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee of DEAC or anyone else who is in a position of control over DEAC and has a personal interest that is in conflict with the interests of DEAC.

   c. A "family member" is a spouse, parent, child, or spouse of a child or a brother, sister, or spouse of a brother or sister, of an interested person.

   d. A "material financial interest" in an entity is a financial interest of any kind, which, in view of all the circumstances, is substantial enough that it would, or reasonably could, affect an interested person's or family member's judgment with respect to transactions to which the entity is a party. Where the potential for pecuniary gain or the appearance of it is involved, as in reporting on or evaluating a current or potential direct competitor or partner or an institution in which the participant has a financial interest, the participant has a conflict of interest.

   e. An "appearance of a conflict" means there is an appearance of partiality involved, as in a situation where the person who has a conflict of interest has a relationship with an institution or its principals such that evaluations or

decisions may appear to be unduly influenced by that relationship.

f. A "duality of interests" means when a person holds two or more roles that conflict or *could* conflict with the interest of DEAC, or has an ethical conflict between duties owed to DEAC and another institution that lead to real or potential tension in decision-making ("dual loyalty").

2. **Procedures**

In the event of a real or possible conflict of interest, the accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee should disclose the circumstances should be disclosed to the DEAC executive director, as appropriate, and a decision made as to what course of action the organization or individuals should take so that the best interests of the DEAC are not compromised by the personal interests of stakeholders in the DEAC.

As warranted by context, either separate from, or prior to, a Commission meeting, an on-site evaluation, a course/program review, an appeals panel hearing, a consultation, or any action on an institution involving a conflict of interest, the person having a conflict of interest shall disclose to the DEAC executive director all facts material to the conflict of interest. If any interested persons are aware that staff or other persons have a conflict of interest, relevant facts should be disclosed by the interested person him/herself to the executive director for purposes of disclosure.

Where the appearance of partiality is involved, as in a situation where the person who has a conflict of interest has a relationship with an institution or its principals such that evaluations or decisions may appear to be unduly influenced by that relationship, the person with the conflict of interest must advise the next higher person in the process and must recuse him/herself. Guidance should be sought from the DEAC executive director in questionable cases.

A person who has a conflict of interest shall not participate in or be permitted to hear any discussion of or to vote on any matter being considered. Such person shall not attempt to exert his or her personal influence with respect to the matter, either at or outside the meeting.

In the event it is not entirely clear that a conflict of interest exists, the individual with the potential conflict shall disclose the circumstances to the DEAC staff member/executive director, who shall determine whether a conflict of interest exists that is subject to this policy.

The following procedures are specific for Institutional Commissioners only:

- If a commissioner believes there is a conflict of interest at any point, it is

required for them to report the conflict of interest to the DEAC executive director immediately.

- Commissioners that are currently employed with a DEAC institution must notify the executive director of a conflict of interest. Depending on the conflict it could result in a request for resignation from the Commission.
- Commissioners that are currently employed with a DEAC institution and submit an application or intent of applying for a new institutional accreditation, must resign from their commissioner position.

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

   a. Each commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall exercise care not to disclose confidential information acquired in connection with disclosures of conflicts of interest or potential conflicts, which might be adverse to the interests of DEAC.

   b. Commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, consultants, administrative staff, appeals panel members, and employees will not discuss any confidential aspect of an application for DEAC accreditation with the applicant, an institution accredited by DEAC, a direct competitor of the applicant, or any other third party except as required in order to discharge the responsibilities of the participant in the accreditation review. DEAC will communicate the results of the Commission's decision to the applicant and the public.

   c. Furthermore, commissioners, evaluators, subject specialists, consultants, administrative staff, appeals panel members, and employees shall not disclose or use information relating to the business of DEAC for their personal profit or advantage or the personal profit or advantage of their family member(s).

4. **Review of Policy**
   The following describes the review process for this policy:

   a. Each commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall be provided with and asked to review a copy of this policy and to acknowledge in writing that he or she has done so.

   b. Each commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee shall complete a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form identifying any relationships, positions or

circumstances in which s/he is involved that s/he believes could present a conflict of interest.

c. Any such information regarding the business interests of an commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or DEAC employee, or a family member thereof, shall be treated as confidential and shall generally be made available only to the executive director and any committee appointed to address conflicts of interest, except to the extent additional disclosure is necessary in connection with the implementation of this policy.

d. This policy shall be reviewed annually by each member of the Commission. Any changes to the policy shall be communicated to all staff and interested persons.

e. On-site evaluators must annually read and agree to the conditions of the DEAC Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators in addition to this policy.

5. **Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form**
   This form is completed annually by each accrediting commissioner, evaluator, subject specialist, consultant, administrative staff, appeals panel member, or employee.

   *I agree to complete the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form for all institutions I review. I have read and received a copy of DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy.*

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

## II. Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form

Institution(s) being reviewed: _____

Date Visit/Review/Meeting: _____

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

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

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

For further purposes of the policy, the following circumstances for Institutional Commissioners only shall be deemed to create a conflict of interest:

- Currently employed with a DEAC institution that initiates a request for change in institutional accrediting agency
- or publicly announces intent to withdraw from DEAC accreditation;

Other situations may create the appearance of a conflict or present a duality of interests for Commissioners only in connection with a person who has influence over the activities or finances of the DEAC. Below are three examples, but not inclusive of all examples:

- Addition of a second institutional accrediting agency with the Department of Education;
- Enters a formal relationship (e.g., membership) with a second institutional accrediting agency;
- Currently serving on a board, advisory council, or committee of a second institutional accrediting agency.

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

The following procedures are specific for Commissioners only:

- If a commissioner believes there is a conflict of interest at any point, it is required for them to report the conflict of interest to the DEAC executive director immediately.
- Commissioners that are currently employed with a DEAC institution must notify the executive director of a conflict of interest. Depending on the conflict it could result in a request for resignation from the Commission.
- Commissioners that are currently employed with a DEAC institution and submit an application or intent of applying for a new or additional institutional accreditation, must resign from their commissioner position.

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

_____ I **do** have a conflict of interest to report (please describe below)

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

Signature: _____Today's Date: _____

Name:_____ DEAC Role:_____

Title _____ Email:_____

Institution/Company _____

Description of possible conflict of interest:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

## III. Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators

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

As an on-site evaluator, I agree to:

1. conduct myself in a manner which seeks to avoid a conflict of interest or any appearance of conflict of interest;

2. read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form;

3. engage in no outside employment or other outside activity not compatible with the full and proper discharge of the responsibilities of a member of the DEAC Examining Committee;

4. recruit no staff or offer my services, nor shall I take any information or materials for personal interest or gain during the on-site evaluation;

5. state no opinion or prediction concerning possible action by the Commission that may result from the on-site evaluation;

6. direct any inquiries I may have, or request for additional information after the on-site visit, to the DEAC staff;

7. treat all information obtained through the institution's participation in the accreditation process as confidential, and not disclose such information to parties other than members of the examining committee, the Commission, and the DEAC staff except pursuant to valid governmental regulation or judicial procedure;

8. participate in no litigation or other legal proceedings involving institutions that are or may seek to become accredited by DEAC without consulting with DEAC's counsel and the executive director;

9. discuss no accreditation matters on behalf of the appeals panel or Commission with members of the media, referring any media inquiries to the executive director;

10. discuss no legal matters involving the institution evaluated or to be evaluated with counsel for the institution or any third party;

11. exercise due diligence in becoming familiar with, and an authority on, DEAC accreditation standards and policies;

12. participate in a training program prior to my participation in on-site evaluations that include training on DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy, exercise due diligence in preparing for the institution's on-site evaluation, and come to the on-site evaluation familiar with all assigned materials and prepared to fully participate in the process;

13. participate fully in the process and otherwise conduct myself during the on-site visit in a manner consistent with my best, impartial and unfettered judgment, and in furtherance of the Commission's purpose;

14. conduct myself professionally, impartially, and courteously during the on-site evaluation; and

15. report any alleged violations of the Code of Conduct immediately to the DEAC executive director.

**B. Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators Agreement**

This form is completed annually.

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

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

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

## IV. Selecting and Training Commissioners

### A. Procedures for the Selecting and Training DEAC Commissioners

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

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

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

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

### B. Size and Make-up of the Commission

The selection criteria used for the Board of Directors who serve as the Accrediting Commission are prescribed by the DEAC Bylaws Article IV Directors. Under Section 2, it states the Board of Directors will "consist of twelve (12) Directors, six (6) Institutional Directors from Members of the Corporation elected by the Members and six (6) Public Directors appointed by the Board of Directors to represent the public. Under Section 3 it states that at least two members of the Commission must be "academics," defined by DEAC as a person who works full time at an educational institution who, possibly in addition to other duties, actively teaches, delivers educational content to learners, or engages in educational research related to the institution's mission. At least two members of the Commission must be "administrators" defined by DEAC as a person currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in the administration of an institution."

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

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

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

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

## C. Qualifications of Commissioners

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

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

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

1. Personal qualities of leadership, integrity, ability, and personal reputation; and

2. Formal education—earning one or more appropriately accredited academic degrees.

A Public Commissioner may not be 1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution that either is accredited by DEAC or has applied for such accreditation; 2) a member of any organization that transacts business with or receives any funding or payments from DEAC; or 3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in 1) or 2) above.

**Institution Commissioners:** Institution Commissioners are selected from DEAC-accredited institutions and are individuals who are currently active academic or

administrative personnel who do not have a representative currently serving on the Accrediting Commission.

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

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

1. The personal qualities of leadership, integrity, ability, and personal reputation;

2. Formal education—holding one or more appropriately accredited academic degrees;

3. Experience in the distance study field with a contemporary knowledge of the field;

4. Demonstrated supportiveness of the accrediting program;

5. Experience as a member of Accrediting Examining Committees; and

6. Interest in and support of the Distance Education Accrediting Commission as evidenced by regular attendance at DEAC functions and personal as well as institutional participation on committees and at DEAC workshops, conferences, and other events.

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

**D. Responsibilities of Commissioners**

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

1. Establish, implement, and promulgate standards and policies reflecting the qualities of sound and reputable distance education and training institutions and determine effective procedures and administrative guidelines for evaluating distance education and training institutions seeking DEAC accreditation.

2. Receive and act upon applications for accreditation and reaccreditation from distance education institutions, evaluate new programs submitted for approval, decide the merits of any petitions from institutions, and oversee an ongoing program that ensures all standards are policies are effective, current, and compliant with existing requirements for a recognized accrediting association.

3. Conduct an institutional accreditation program that is compliant with extant federal and CHEA-adopted recognition criteria for nationally recognized accrediting associations.

4. Review the reports of evaluation committees and all other pertinent materials, including the Self-Evaluation Report, and, acting as a joint body of decision makers, accredit, deny, or withdraw accreditation from accredited institutions or order a Show Cause. In cases where accreditation is withdrawn or denied, the institution will be given the reasons for the adverse decision and will be given the opportunity of appealing the adverse decision before it becomes final.

5. Re-evaluate accredited institutions at reasonable intervals.

6. Exercise such other powers and duties as are necessary to carry out the functions of a nationally recognized accrediting association.

**E. Training of Commissioners**

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

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

**F. Conflict of Interest**

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

## V. Selecting and Training Evaluators

### A. Procedures for Selecting and Training DEAC Evaluators

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

### B. On-Site Evaluators

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

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

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

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

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

1. Have demonstrated expertise, ability, and accomplishment in the area they are selected to examine;

2. Read, agree to abide by, and sign the DEAC Code of Conduct for On-Site Evaluators, which includes reading, agreeing to abide by, and signing DEAC's Conflict

of Interest Policy and Conflict of Interest and Disclosure Form (see below); and

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

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

**C. Subject Specialist**

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

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

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

The duty of a subject specialist is to determine if curriculum materials offered by the institution are complete, accurate, and up to date in light of the stated objectives of the course. The subject specialist must judge whether the course is of good quality

and whether it meets the published standards of the Accrediting Commission. For credit-bearing courses, the subject specialists must be able to judge the comparability of curricula to in-residence programs.

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

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

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

**D. Conflict of Interest**

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

**E. Functions of Evaluating Team Members**

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

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

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

3. **Education Evaluator**
   - Evaluates institution's compliance with accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
   - Submits report to the Chair and the director of accreditation

- Verifies special areas through documentation and interviews:
    - Institutional mission
    - Institutional effectiveness and strategic planning
    - Program outcomes, curricula, and materials
    - Educational and student support services
    - Student achievement and satisfaction
    - Academic leadership and faculty qualifications
    - Admissions practices
- Reviews comments from subject specialists
- Handles special concern by reviewing:
    - Student surveys and/or complaints
    - Curricula and online platforms
    - Student records and tracking progression
    - Course/program completions
    - Examinations and other assessments
    - Faculty interaction
    - Outcomes assessment plan and data
    - Student and faculty files
    - Minutes of board, advisory boards, faculty meetings, curriculum committees, etc.
    - Strategic plan and other research
    - Succession plan

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

5. **Degree Program Evaluator**
    - Evaluates accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
    - Submits report to the Chair and director of accreditation
    - Reviews subject specialists' comments
    - Handles special concerns by reviewing:

- Program outcomes, curricula, and instructional materials
- Faculty qualifications
- Student/faculty ratios
- Credit hour policy and data

6. **Subject Specialists**
   - Evaluates accreditation standards using DEAC rating forms
   - Submits report to the Chair and director of accreditation
   - Reviews curricula, assignments/examinations, student/faculty interaction
   - Interviews faculty/instructors and students

7. **DEAC Staff Member**
   - Coordinates schedules and logistics
   - Answers questions concerning accreditation standards and procedures

8. **State Agency or other Government-related Observer**
   - Participates as a full member of the on-site team
   - Provides pertinent information from state files
   - Observes institution's evaluation and accreditation process
   - Files comments to DEAC (optional)

## VI. Selecting and Training Appeals Panel Members

### A. Procedures for Selecting and Training DEAC Appeals Panel Members

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

### B. Appeals Process

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

### C. Process for Selection of an Appeals Panel Member

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

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

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

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

**D. Training of Appeals Panel Members**

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

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

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

**E. Responsibility and Duties of the Appeals Panel Members**

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

1. when appointed to the appeals panel, s/he must read, sign, and abide by DEAC's Conflict of Interest Policy and sign the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form. These forms must be submitted to DEAC within 10 days after agreeing to serve on an appeals panel;

2. exercise due diligence in becoming familiar with, and an authority on, DEAC standards, policies, and procedures, and participate in all training sessions conducted by DEAC's staff;

3. agree to review all documentation pertinent to the institution's appeal;

4. treat all information obtained through the institution's participation in the appeal process as confidential, and do not disclose such information to parties

other than the DEAC staff and legal counsel;

5. direct any inquiries s/he may have, or request for additional information after the appeal hearing to the DEAC executive director;

6. state no opinion or prediction concerning possible actions the Commission may take as a result of the appeal hearing; and

7. exercise such powers and duties as are necessary to carry out the functions of a DEAC appeals panel.

## VII. Obligations of Accreditation

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

**A. File an Annual Report**

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

**B. Pay Annual Dues and Accreditation Fees**

An accredited institution is charged an annual accreditation fee to sustain the accreditation process. As a member of DEAC, each member institution is charged annual dues. These dues support the research and professional activities of DEAC. The dues and fees are based on annual tuition receipts. An institution must submit a completed "Computation for Dues and Fees Form." A statement is sent to the institution indicating the amount of dues and accreditation fees owed. Dues and fees not paid in full by April 30 are charged a late fee. An accredited institution failing to meet its financial obligations to DEAC by September 30 is subject to a special accreditation visit.

**C. Teach-Out Commitment**

The institution should be mindful of its formal commitment to "teach out" all students who enroll in its distance study programs irrespective of changes in the institution's accreditation status. The institution should update the Teach-Out Commitment and send it to the Commission when there are changes in the institution's ownership, management, or location. Institutions must also submit a Teach-Out Plan, if required.

**D. New and Revised Courses**

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

**E. Correct Any Incorrect or Misleading Information**

An accredited institution is required to issue public correction to all incorrect or misleading information knowingly or unknowingly released in reference to its accreditation status, the contents of reports of the examining committee from accreditation-related visits, and/or any actions taken by the Commission with respect to the institution.

**F. Maintain Proper Licensures, Authorizations, or Approvals**

An accredited institution may not retain accreditation if it is not properly licensed, authorized, or approved by the applicable state educational oversight authority. Each accredited institution must conform to all the provisions of applicable laws and regulations.

**G. Advise Commission in a Timely Manner**

An accredited institution must promptly inform the Commission of any actions it plans to take itself or actions taken against it by other agencies if those actions could affect its good status in the eyes of the Commission or the public, and resolve complaints in a forthright, prompt, amicable, and equitable manner. Members should make periodic contact with the staff of the Commission apprising them of governmental and media actions which may affect their institutions or the Commission.

**H. Advise Commission of Substantive Change**

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

**I. Participate in On-Site Evaluations**

An institution should encourage its staff and faculty to actively participate in DEAC's accreditation process as one opportunity for professional development. The Commission conducts training sessions through its online course entitled *DEAC 102 - Evaluator Training*. Peer-reviewers receive instructions on being effective evaluators.

**J. Renewal of Accreditation**

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

**K. Failure to Meet Obligations**

If at any time an institution fails to meet its obligations of accreditation in a timely manner, including failure to pay its financial obligations to DEAC, the Commission may order a special visit.

## VIII. DEAC Code of Ethics for Student Recruitment Personnel

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

**A.** As a student recruitment representative of an accredited distance education institution, I recognize that I have certain responsibilities toward students, the public, and my institution. To fulfill these responsibilities, I pledge adherence to this Code of Ethics.

**B.** I will observe fully the accreditation standards, rules, policies, procedures, and guidelines established by my institution, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, the state education agency, and other legally authorized agencies.

**C.** I will adhere to high ethical standards in the conduct of my work, and to the best of my ability, will:

1. Observe fully the rights of all applicants and commit no action that would be detrimental to any applicant's opportunity to enroll because of race, sex, color, creed, or national origin.

2. Never knowingly make any false or misleading representation to any applicant or use any coercive practices in presenting information.

3. Enroll applicants only in the course or courses in which they have expressed their interest, provided they meet the qualifications and standards established by my institution for enrollment.

4. Provide applicants only with information authorized by my institution regarding the occupational opportunities for graduates, and never make claims guaranteeing employment, job promotion prospects, or income increases to an applicant.

5. State accurately and clearly to prospective students the approvals, accreditation, business and employer recognition, and course acceptance accorded to my institution.

6. Provide only full and accurate information on the transferability of academic credits and acceptance of degrees or credentials by other educational institutions, and disclose affirmatively the fact that the acceptance of credits and degrees is entirely the prerogative of the receiving institution and acceptance cannot be guaranteed.

7. Provide prospective applicants only complete and accurate information on the total financial obligation they will be incurring prior to accepting their enrollment

application.

8. Provide students prior to enrolling complete and accurate information about financing options for students, and answer any questions.

9. Never use tuition assistance available from a government agency or other source as the primary inducement for enrollment.

10. Refrain at all times from making any statement or inference that might falsely impugn the integrity or value of any other institution, method of training, or profession.

11. Discharge faithfully, and to the best of my ability, all of the duties and obligations and procedures established by my institution for my position and know all of my obligations and obligations as an institutional representative.

12. Reflect at all times the highest credit upon myself, my institution, and the field of distance education, and always strive to enhance the reputation of my profession through my conduct as an institutional representative.

## IX. English Language Proficiency Assessment

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

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

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

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

3. **First Professional Degree or Professional Doctoral Degree:** A minimum score of **65** on the paper-delivered Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL PBT), or **80** on the Internet Based Test (iBT); **6.5** on the International English Language Test (IELTS); **58** on the Pearson Test of English Academic Score Report; **105** on the Duolingo English Test; or **55** on the 4-skill Michigan English Test (MET), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE), or **650/LP** on the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE).

4. A minimum score on the College Board Accuplacer ESL Exam Series as follows:

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

5. A minimum grade of Pre-1 on the Eiken English Proficiency Exam;

6. A minimum B-2 English proficiency level identified within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standards and assessed through various ESOL examinations, including the University of Cambridge;

7. A transcript indicating completion of at least 30 semester credit hours with an average grade of "C" or higher at an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), or accepted foreign equivalent that is listed in the International Handbook of Universities where the language of instruction was English. An average grade of B or higher is required for the master's degree, first professional degree, or professional doctoral degree.

**B.** Transcripts not in English must be evaluated by an appropriate third party and translated into English or evaluated by a trained transcript evaluator fluent in the language on the transcript. In this case, the evaluator must have expertise in the educational practices of the country of origin and include an English translation of the review.

## X. Student Achievement Benchmarks

The degree program benchmarks are set forth in the table below and are effective with the submission of the 2025 Annual Report. DEAC is continuing with its historical practice of setting graduation rate benchmarks at approximately 10 points below the average for the total number of students in all institutions at each degree level. Data are collected from DEAC-accredited institutions as a baseline for the use of empirical, quantitative measures of institutional effectiveness and improvement strategies that focus on distance education. DEAC reviews the data it receives each year in annual report submissions from accredited institutions to determine if adjustments are needed. This practice is intended to accommodate both annual fluctuations within institutions and variable factors across institutions and programs.

| | ***Three Year Average Graduation Rate‡*** | ***Graduation Rate Benchmark*** |
|---|---|---|
| Associate Degree Programs | 36% | *32% |
| Bachelor's Degree Programs | 49% | 39% |
| Master's Degree Programs | 72% | 62% |
| First Professional Degree Programs | 66% | 56% |
| Doctoral Degree Programs | 44% | 34% |

**The Commission does not set a benchmark at 10 points below the average for this degree level.*
*‡ Based on 2022, 2023, and 2024 DEAC Annual Report Data*

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

| | ***Three Year Average Completion Rate‡*** | ***Completion Rate Benchmark*** |
|---|---|---|
| Non-degree Programs | 70% | 60% |

*‡ Based on 2022, 2023, and 2024 DEAC Annual Report Data*

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

## XI. Student Achievement and Satisfaction

Accredited institutions must assess the achievement and satisfaction of students through a systematic and ongoing process aligned with their mission and strategic planning. In addition, institutions should implement institutional effectiveness assessment processes and reporting to validate the institution's outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment Planning plays a pivotal role in demonstrating that the institution implements a systematic and ongoing process to evaluate the content and delivery of its educational programs (Standard III.C, Institutional Effectiveness). During DEAC's accreditation process, institutions are required to demonstrate in their Self-Evaluation Report (SER) the implementation of institutional policies and procedures that support the achievement of student learning outcomes. Central to this demonstration is the submission of a comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plan, which specifically focuses on the direct evaluation of student learning outcomes upon program completion in comparison to predetermined standards.

The Outcomes Assessment Plan should be a formally documented strategy that outlines how student learning outcomes are developed, regularly reviewed, and assessed (*see* Standard IV: Academic Achievement). Details may include information on curriculum and assessment mapping, analysis of assessment data, action plans for enhancing student achievement, and evaluations of the effectiveness of improvement initiatives. The plan should also address how student learning outcomes align with the institution's mission, are suitable for the level of academic rigor offered, and can be achieved through distance learning pedagogies. Furthermore, the foundation of an effective Outcomes Assessment Plan is grounded in the establishment of clear and measurable learning outcomes that are both achievable and aligned with the program's objectives. These outcomes should be quantifiable, realistic, and appropriately suited to the academic level of the program.

Assessment serves as an ongoing process essential for comprehending and enhancing student learning outcomes. A well-crafted Outcomes Assessment Plan for an institution should outline: 1) the desired competencies or knowledge the institution aims for students to acquire, 2) methods for verifying student achievement of these outcomes, and 3) strategies for leveraging assessment data to enhance teaching and learning practices.

Furthermore, the Outcomes Assessment Plan should illustrate how assessment data on student learning outcomes contribute to the institution's overall effectiveness and strategic planning processes. Special attention should be given to how these assessments support mission fulfillment and continuous improvement efforts, particularly in the areas of student learning and curriculum development.

### A. Direct Measures

Institutions should have established policies and procedures for evaluating various direct student outcome measures, such as completion rates, retention rates, time to

completion, standardized exam results, licensing pass rates, job placement rates, among others (*see* Standard IV.B). These measures should be benchmarked against past institutional performance, industry standards, and expectations set forth by relevant accreditation bodies.

It is essential that institutions demonstrate that these direct measures are consistently collected, analyzed at both aggregate and disaggregate levels to identify achievement disparities, evaluated on a regular basis, and integrated into institutional effectiveness and strategic planning processes. By leveraging data from these measures, institutions can drive continuous improvement initiatives and ensure alignment with their mission objectives.

**B. Indirect Measures**

In addition to direct measures, institutions should utilize indirect measures to methodically gather stakeholder perceptions and feedback on institutional performance concerning educational quality, administrative processes, and support services. These indirect measures play a crucial role in assessing the overall effectiveness of the institution.

To effectively capture stakeholder perceptions, the institution should maintain a comprehensive set of surveys tailored to evaluate various aspects of its educational offerings. This includes end-of-course surveys to assess individual courses, instruction, and learning materials. Moreover, broader surveys should be deployed to gather feedback from students, alumni, and employers regarding the academic quality, relevance of knowledge, and the preparedness of students to succeed in their respective fields.

Student and alumni surveys should encompass inquiries about instructional quality, adequacy of support services (such as enrollment processes, financial aid, and academic counseling), and overall satisfaction with the educational experience. These surveys serve as valuable tools for understanding stakeholder perspectives and identifying areas for improvement. Other valuable data may include employment community input, as appropriate to the learning outcomes and institutional mission.

**C. DEAC-Required Data for Surveys During Accreditation Processes**

Institutions should prepare to provide DEAC with data throughout any accreditation process, including data for DEAC to administer surveys of students and stakeholders.

As part of the accreditation requirements, institutions are required to submit a list of student contact information (corresponding to various institutional divisions, if applicable) so that DEAC staff may independently survey student satisfaction not just with educational programming, but with all aspects of an institution's operations. The Commission examines data collected independently of the

institution's procedures via the DEAC-administered student survey form as one component of evaluating an institution's compliance with DEAC Standards.

The Commission, along with on-site evaluators, thoroughly examines the student survey outcomes to gauge the institution's performance in terms of student satisfaction. By comparing the results of the DEAC-administered student survey with those conducted internally by the institution, on-site evaluation teams seek to validate the institution's survey outcomes and ensure a comprehensive evaluation of student perspectives.

In addition to student survey outcomes, DEAC considers various sources of evidence to assess student achievement and satisfaction. This includes analyzing student complaints lodged against the institution, compiling feedback DEAC may receive as a result of its *Call for Comment on Institutions to be Considered for Accreditation* posted on the DEAC website as well as records issued to state and federal agencies and consumer protection entities, and reviewing any pertinent data or information available from diverse sources.

**D. Annual Reporting and Assessment of Student Achievement Data**

Institutions are required to submit DEAC annual reports. Through annual reports that include incremental updates of student achievement data, DEAC monitors student achievement and gauges the impact of an institution's Outcomes Assessment Plan.

Standard IV. B requires the institution to maintain a systematic and ongoing processes for assessing student achievement, analyzes aggregated and disaggregated 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 Annual Report, due each spring, serves as a crucial tool for institutions to structure and showcase student achievement data in a standardized format for review by the DEAC. In cases where an institution encounters challenges in meeting the specified comparable benchmarks, it has the option to propose additional data sets and analysis for demonstrating compliance with Standard IV: Academic Achievement and the DEAC Benchmarks (*see* Appendix X). The Commission evaluates such proposals on a case-by-case basis to determine their suitability for fulfilling the accreditation criteria.

By leveraging a multifaceted approach to evaluating student achievement and satisfaction, DEAC engages in a comprehensive assessment of institutional performance and evaluates adherence to accreditation standards. This robust evaluation process underscores DEAC's commitment to upholding academic excellence and student satisfaction within the context of institution mission and the profile of students served. In the evaluation process, the DEAC meticulously examines the data presented in the institution's Annual Report, comparing completion and graduation rates with those of similar institutions offering

comparable courses/programs and degree levels. DEAC staff determines the institutions and programs considered similar for this comparative analysis. For institutions seeking initial accreditation or renewal, on-site evaluators and subject matter experts review this material in conjunction with the information in the Self-Evaluation Report, aligning it with data provided by DEAC for a comprehensive assessment.

For a course or program to receive a "favorable comparison," its completion rate should not deviate more than 15 points from the mean completion rate of similar courses/programs within the institution's designated peer group. Similarly, graduation rates for degree programs are benchmarked against comparable degree levels (e.g., associate, bachelor's, master's, first professional, and professional doctorate).

If DEAC's initial evaluation of an Annual Report indicates that an institution's data does not align favorably with those of similar DEAC-accredited institutions, the institution is required to submit a detailed written explanation outlining the data collection methodology. The evidence provided by the institution must be relevant, verifiable, representative, and cumulative, without being manipulated to achieve a specific outcome. The institution bears the responsibility of furnishing evidence to demonstrate compliance with Standard V: Student Achievement and Satisfaction. The Commission then reviews this explanation and takes appropriate actions, which may include accepting the institution's rationale without further action, recommending modifications to the course/program, or initiating a full reaccreditation review if necessary changes are not implemented.

Furthermore, in its Annual Report, the institution has the opportunity to provide a narrative detailing any enhancements or modifications made based on the outcomes assessment findings from the reporting year. These institutional changes can range from minor adjustments to significant improvements, depending on the insights gleaned from the assessment data.

**E. Aligning Data Assessment for Comprehensive Compliance**

Through comprehensive assessment planning institutions have a valuable opportunity to clearly communicate how both aggregated and disaggregated data collected through direct and indirect measures contribute to demonstrating institutional effectiveness, informing strategic planning initiatives and supporting continuous improvement efforts.

Institutions are required to share summary data with relevant stakeholder groups (see Standard III.A., Mission Achievement, and Standard V.D: Program Advisory Council(s)). By transparently presenting the results of their direct and indirect assessments within their Outcomes Assessment Plan, institutions can create a strong link between evidence of compliance and multiple standards (Standard III: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness; Standard IV: Academic Achievement; and

Standard V.D: Program Advisory Council(s)). This demonstrates a commitment to leveraging stakeholder feedback to enhance educational quality, administrative processes, and support services.

By showcasing the insights gained from this data analysis, institutions can better understand their strengths and areas for growth. This approach not only enhances transparency and accountability within the institution but also demonstrates a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By aligning data assessment activities across the institution, institutions are able to provide a more comprehensive view of their effectiveness in fulfilling their mission during the annual reporting period and the preparation of the SER.

## XII. Pilot Programs

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

### A. Eligibility

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

### B. Application

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

An applicant for a pilot program must submit the following:

1. A narrative statement demonstrating the applicant's eligibility and alignment with its mission and describing the pilot program in detail. This narrative should indicate the specific accreditation standards for which a waiver is requested. The narrative should include a description of the specific objectives sought to be accomplished and an explanation of how the pilot program will strengthen the institution, contribute to the development of its education and training, and benefit students.

2. A statement of the length of time necessary to implement the pilot program proposal and to assess its effectiveness. This statement should explain the basis of the institution's projections.

3. A demonstration that the faculty, instructional material, equipment, and facilities that will be used in conjunction with the pilot program are sufficient to meet the objectives of the proposal. This demonstration must include staff and faculty personnel reports for all persons who will act in an instructional or administrative capacity in the pilot program and a detailed description of the instructional materials, equipment, and facilities that may be used.

4. A projection of the number of students expected to enroll and complete the training and the basis for the applicant's projections.

5. An explanation of how the applicant will recruit and admit students, assure that

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

6. A plan that describes the funding for the pilot program and demonstrates that the applicant is able to support and complete the pilot program.

7. A certification statement, signed by the applicant, that the information included in the application for a pilot program is true and correct.

**C. Evaluation**

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

**D. Commission Review**

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

## XIII. Special Circumstances that Warrant Waivers of DEAC Standards & Procedures

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

**A.** DEAC and the institution can show that the circumstances requiring the period of noncompliance are beyond the institution's control, such as—

1. A natural disaster or other catastrophic event significantly impacting an institution's or program's operations.
2. Accepting students from another institution that is implementing a teach-out or closing.
3. Significant and documented local or national economic changes, such as an economic recession or closure of a large local employer.
4. Changes relating to State licensure requirements.
5. The normal application of the agency's standards creates an undue hardship on students, or
6. Instructors who do not meet the agency's typical faculty standards, but who are otherwise qualified by education or work experience, to teach courses within a dual or concurrent enrollment program, as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7801, or career and technical education courses.

**B.** The grant of the period of noncompliance is approved by DEAC's decision-making body,

**C.** DEAC projects that the institution or program has the resources necessary to achieve compliance with the standard, policy, or procedure postponed within the time allotted, and

**D.** The institution or program demonstrates to the satisfaction of DEAC that the period of noncompliance will not—

1. Contribute to the cost of the program to the student without the student's consent;
2. Create any undue hardship on, or harm to, students; or
3. Compromise the program's academic quality.

## XIV. Refund Policy Requirements

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

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

Institutions utilizing a subscription-based tuition model apply a subscription period cancellation policy (see Appendix XV) instead of a refund policy.

1. Flexible Time Schedule Refund Policy

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

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

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

2. Time-Based Term Refund Policy

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

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

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

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

| **Length of Term** | **Percentage of Tuition Returned to the Student Minus the Application and/or Registration Fee AFTER** | |
|---|---|---|
| 1-6 weeks | 1st week | 70% |
| | 2nd week | 40% |
| | 3rd week | 20% |
| | 4th week | 0% |
| 7-10 weeks | 1st week | 80% |
| | 2nd week | 60% |
| | 3rd week | 40% |
| | 4th week | 20% |
| | 5th week | 0% |
| 11-16 weeks | 1st week | 80% |
| | 2nd week | 70% |
| | 3rd week | 60% |
| | 4th week | 50% |
| | 5th week | 40% |
| | 6th week | 30% |
| | 7th week | 20% |
| | 8th week | 10% |
| | 9th week | 0% |

3. Refund Policy for In-Residence Courses/Programs

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

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

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

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

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

## XV. Subscription-Based Tuition Model

A Subscription-Based Tuition Model allows institutions to offer a variable amount of educational content to students during a defined period of time, referred to as a subscription period. Under this model, the institution charges students a recurring fee based on the length of the subscription, with the flexibility to accommodate varying amounts of coursework completed during that period. The specific terms related to subscription, renewal, and cancellation must be clearly communicated to students, ensuring transparency and consistency with DEAC's established standards.

While institutions may adopt the subscription model, it is essential that a cancellation policy is implemented in compliance with state requirements or, in the absence of such requirements, in accordance with DEAC's cancellation policy standards ensuring fairness and transparency for students and aligning with the broader principles of equitable financial practices. The following guidelines outline key considerations for the implementation of a subscription-based tuition model.

The institution must establish Subscription Terms and Conditions, incorporated into the enrollment agreement, under which the student elects to participate in the institution's subscription model, setting the general terms of recurring billing and cancellation. To maintain an active subscription, students must periodically reaffirm their subscription. This reaffirmation can be achieved through notifications prior to the start of each new subscription cycle, or at least annually. This process helps ensure that students remain informed of their financial commitments and ongoing participation in the program.

**Subscription Period Cancellation Policy**

The institution must provide students a period of no fewer than five (5) calendar days from the start of each subscription period, during which a full refund of that period's payment must be granted upon written or electronic notice of cancellation.

Students may cancel their subscription at any time by following the institution's published cancellation process. Upon cancellation, the student will receive written confirmation. Regardless of when cancellation occurs, access to courses and institutional services will remain active through the end of the current subscription period. After this period ends, the student's access to coursework, faculty interaction, and institutional resources will expire, and the student will be considered inactive unless they re-enroll or renew their subscription.

## XVI. Guiding Principles for International Accreditation Activities

In an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world, the pursuit of quality higher education across borders is paramount. DEAC's international accreditation process seeks to ensure that higher education institutions uphold rigorous standards that promote academic excellence, institutional integrity, positive student outcomes, and continuous improvement, particularly in the distance learning environment. Grounded in the guidelines set forth by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), we aim to foster trust,

accountability, integrity, and transparency in the global higher education landscape. By adhering to these principles, institutions accredited by DEAC can provide learners with credible and valuable educational experiences that meet or exceed international benchmarks.

Note: For institutions authorized to award academic degrees by governmental entities outside the United States, a grant of accreditation by DEAC and adherence to DEAC standards, policies, and procedures does not validate nor certify that academic degrees and offerings qualify as a U.S. credential or degree. In addition to DEAC accreditation, adherence to U.S. standards and regulations with respect to state requirements, professional and licensure requirements, transfer of credit, is likely to be necessary for any non-U.S. degree to be recognized as equivalent to those offered within the United States.

Guiding Principles for DEAC International Accreditation

1. Academic Excellence:
   - Institutions demonstrate a commitment to providing high-quality education through well-defined curricula, robust assessment strategies, qualified faculty, and comprehensive support services.
   - Continuous evaluation and improvement of academic programs are essential to maintain relevance and rigor.

2. Institutional Integrity:
   - Institutions operate with integrity, honesty, transparency, and accountability in all aspects of their governance, administration, and interactions with key stakeholders.
   - Ethical practices are upheld in enrollment/admissions, financial management, marketing, and student services.

3. Student-Centered Learning:
   - Educational programs are designed to meet the diverse needs of students, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and equitable opportunities for all learners.
   - Institutions provide robust support systems to foster student success, including academic advising, student support, career services, and other resources contributing to the well-being of students.

4. Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement:
   - Institutions have established and maintain effective quality assurance mechanisms to regularly evaluate and enhance the quality of their educational offerings.
   - Data-driven decision-making and key stakeholder feedback should inform evidence-based continuous improvement efforts.

5. Transparency and Accountability:
   - Clear and accurate information regarding accreditation status, institutional policies, program offerings, and student outcomes are publicly available.
   - Institutions are accountable to their students, accrediting bodies, and the broader community for maintaining high standards and fulfilling their educational mission.

6. Global Standards and Collaboration:
   - Where possible and relevant, institutions will align their practices with internationally recognized standards and engage in collaborative efforts to promote best practices in higher education.
   - Participation in DEAC initiatives and conferences facilitates international networks and partnerships that enhance institutional quality and contribute to the global exchange of knowledge and expertise.

7. Ethical and Responsible Conduct:
   - Institutions adhere to ethical standards in all aspects of their operations, ensuring fairness, respect, and integrity in their interactions with students, staff, and external partners.
   - Responsible conduct includes compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, as well as proactive measures to prevent and address issues such as academic fraud and misconduct.

8. Compliance with Local Requirements:
   - Institutions meet all local higher education legal, authorization, and quality assurance requirements in the countries where they operate.
   - Compliance with local regulations ensures that institutions are recognized and respected within their countries, contributing to their legitimacy and credibility.

9. Recognition of Local/National Credentials and Degree Offerings:
   - DEAC understands that there are country specific systems and infrastructure related to academic offerings to which institutions are expected to be in compliance and duly approved/recognized.
   - Institutions recognize and align their programs with local/national credentials, degree offerings, and degree levels to ensure compatibility and relevance within the country's educational framework.
   - DEAC recognizes degrees, programs, and credentials that meet local/national standards or frameworks.
   - This alignment enhances the institution's ability to provide education that is meaningful and valued both locally and internationally.

10. Evidence of Financial Sustainability:
    - Institutions must provide evidence of financial sustainability, demonstrating their capacity to support long-term operations and fulfill their educational mission.

- Financial stability is crucial for maintaining the quality of educational programs, supporting faculty and staff, and ensuring the availability of resources necessary for student success.

By adhering to these guiding principles, institutions may achieve and maintain accreditation that reflects their commitment to excellence and their dedication to serving the educational needs of a diverse global community.

## Glossary

**Academic**
A member of an institution of learning, relating to education, scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge.

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

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

**Accreditation**
A formal process through which educational institutions and their programs are evaluated against established standards of quality and effectiveness to ensure that institutions meet specific criteria established by the accrediting organization and fostering trust among students, employers, and the global education community.

**Acronyms (Commonly Used in Higher Education)**

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

| | |
|---|---|
| GPA | Grade Point Average |
| IPEDS | Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System |
| MA | Master of Arts |
| MBA | Master of Business Administration |
| MS | Master of Science |
| NACIQI | National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity |
| NCES | National Center for Education Statistics |
| NCSARA | National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements |
| PHD | Doctor of Philosophy |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language |
| USED | United States Department of Education |

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

**Administrative Site**
A separate office located geographically apart from the main headquarters location. Neither educational programs nor instructional services to students are offered from an administrative site.

**Administrator**
An individual who manages an institution of learning.

**Advanced Standing Enrollment**
Two programs taken sequentially at different levels (e.g., bachelors and masters) in which a limited number of credits (e.g., 9-12 semester hours) of courses in similar topical areas from the more advanced degree are substituted for courses in the degree required for the less advanced degree to make progression more efficient.

**Applied Bachelor's Degree**
An undergraduate degree program that emphasizes practical learning that is designed to prepare students for immediate entry into specific career fields. Applied Bachelor's Degree programs require between 90 and 120 credits. The program name of any Applied Bachelor's Degree programs must be clearly designated as such, e.g. "Applied Bachelor of Science" or "Bachelor of Applied Arts." Applied Bachelor's Degree programs must meet both industry-based expectations and state requirements and must clearly communicate their intended career pathways to prospective students.

**Applied Doctorate**
A practice-oriented degree intended to prepare students for professional practice involving the application of knowledge or the development of new research-based applications within a field of practice. The culminating experience may be a research-based doctoral project, a dissertation, or dissertation in practice.

**Assessment (of Student Learning)**
An ongoing, iterative process consisting of defining learning outcomes, choosing a method or approach to data collection, gathering evidence of learning, analyzing and interpreting the evidence, and using the results to improve student learning.

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

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

**Asynchronous**
Instructional communication or interactions between faculty and students that does not occur at the same time, place, or rate.

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

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

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

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

**Certificate Program**
A program that contains a collection of credit-bearing or non-credit bearing courses, modules, or lessons configured to equip students with specialized knowledge in a subject area with content that is less extensive than what is provided in an entire degree program. May also be called a "diploma" program.

**Change in Legal Status**

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

**Change of Control**
The sale of all or a majority interest of the institution's assets, sale or assignment of the controlling interest of the voting stock of a corporation that owns the institution or that controls the institution through one or more subsidiaries, merger or consolidation of the institution with other institutions, or an independent corporation with a different ownership. When an institution changes its form of control, defined as the ability to direct or cause the direction of the actions of an institution, it is essentially changing ownership.

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

**CIP Codes**
The Classification of Instructional Programs provides a taxonomic framework that facilitates the accurate tracking and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity.

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

**Competency**
In assessment of student learning, the ability to effectively apply knowledge, skills, and behaviors in specific contexts or tasks. It encompasses both theoretical understanding of concepts and the practical application of that knowledge in real-world situations, demonstrating a student's readiness to perform effectively in various scenarios.

**Competency-Based Education**
A pedagogical practice where the focus is on student achievement of competencies. Students a ccess learning resources, including assistance of faculty/instructors directly aligned with the co mpetencies. Competency-based education programs may measure student progress in clock or credit hours.

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

**Continuing Education Units (CEU)**
A measurement of participation in non-credit professional development activities.

**Correspondence Education**
Education provided through one or more courses in which the institution provides instructional materials and examinations by mail or electronic transmission to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is not regular and

substantive, and it is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education for the purposes of participating in Federal Student Assistance Title IV funding programs.

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

**Credit Hours**
Semester and quarter hours are equivalent to the commonly accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement. Academic degrees or academic credit-bearing distance education courses are measured by the learning outcomes normally achieved through 45 hours of student work for one semester credit[1] or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit[2].

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

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

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

**Degree**
A formal qualification awarded by an educational institution, typically after the completion of a prescribed course of study. Degrees signify the attainment of specific knowledge and skills in a particular field and are often categorized into levels such as associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

**Diploma**
A formal document issued by an educational institution certifying the completion of a specific course of study or program. It typically represents a level of education attained, such as high school or vocational training, and signifies that the recipient has met the necessary requirements in that field.

**Diploma Program**
See Certificate Program.

**Direct Assessment Program**
A subset of competency-based education programs where student progress is not tied to credit or clock hours. It implements methods of evaluating student learning that involve the direct measurement of student performance or outcomes. This approach focuses on assessment of the actual work produced by students, such as assignments, projects, exams, and portfolios

**Distance Education (USED's Federal Definition)**
The U.S. Department of Education, for institutions that participate in Title IV Federal Financial Aid programs, defines distance education within the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 34 § 600.2. as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Discount**

A reduction in tuition cost other than for definable merit or demonstrated need. This includes tuition discounts for alumni, employees, or based on business-to-business arrangements or other institutional affiliations.

**Dissertation**
A traditional dissertation is a scholarly research study focused on an original contribution to the body of knowledge of the discipline, expanding on, or filling a gap in scholarship. A "dissertation in practice" is a non-traditional scholarly dissertation focused on a problem of practice (applied research) intended to be used for generative impact on leadership or innovation in a field of practice.

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

**Double Major**
One degree with two areas of specialization conferred by a single institution.

**Dual Degree**
An academic program that allows a student to earn two distinct degrees simultaneously, typically in different fields of study. This approach enables students to gain interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, enhancing their career prospects and academic credentials. This can be two undergraduate degrees, an undergraduate and graduate degree, two graduate/professional degrees. Students are required to be accepted into both programs and complete requirements for both degrees. The degrees may be conferred by a single institution or in partnership with another accredited institution.

**Drop Out**
A student who withdraws or ceases attendance at an institution.

**Educational Offerings**
Academic or vocational courses or programs.

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

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

**Enrollment Agreement (Application, Contract)**
Any agreement or other similar contractual document that creates or evidences an obligation binding a student to purchase educational offerings from an institution.

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

**Faculty**
A broad term that includes individuals providing direct instruction, as well as individuals overseeing instructional services provided by others via unbundled roles including assessors, on-demand subject matter experts and those supervising field experience components.

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

**First Professional Degree**
The first degree representing the minimum academic requirement for practice of a profession. Degree content emphasizes practical/clinical skill over theory and analysis. Although the degree may be at various levels, they are customarily classified as master's or doctorate level in fields such as pharmacy, physical therapy, law, medicine, audiology, optometry, divinity, etc.

**General Education**
Undergraduate course content that conveys broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students, develop transferable skills and attitudes, contribute to civic engagement, academic achievement, and professional attainment; and encourages life-long learning. General education addresses content not strictly associated with a particular field of study but complement and provide the foundational knowledge for learning in the discipline.

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

**Graduate**
An individual who has successfully completed a degree program at an educational institution, typically at the bachelor's level or higher, and has been awarded a diploma or degree as a result.

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

**Hybrid Learning**
Instruction that combines distance education and in-residence components.

**In-Residence Component**
A component within a distance education program that an institution offers or requires the student to complete at a physical location controlled by the institution

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

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

**Instructional Materials**
Resources that are used in educational settings to facilitate learning and support teaching, including textbooks, digital content, workbooks, videos, and other aids that enhance the educational experience.

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

**International Handbook of Universities**
A comprehensive reference that provides detailed information about higher education institutions worldwide. It includes profiles of universities, colleges, and other educational organizations, covering aspects such as programs offered, governance, accreditation, and contact information. It lists institutions that are accepted as foreign equivalents to U.S. institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). https://www.iau-aiu.net/International-Handbook-of-Universities-58

**Job Placement**
An alumni service offered by an institution in which assistance is provided to graduates in finding opportunities for a new career position. Placement is further defined to describe when a

graduate obtains employment as a direct result of the training, skills, or education the graduate received from the institution. The employment must be for a reasonable period of time, based on published program outcomes, and be considered sustainable (e.g., not a single day of employment). The employment must be directly related to the program from which the individual graduated, align with a majority of the educational and training outcomes of the program completed, and be a paid position.

**Joint Degree**
The conferral of a single degree or credential by two accredited institutions. See also Dual Degree.

**Learning Management System (LMS)**
A software platform that facilitates the administration, delivery, and tracking of educational courses and training programs. It enables educators to create, manage, and assess learning activities, providing tools for content delivery, student engagement, and performance analytics.

**Library Resources**
An accessible collection of texts, literary materials, reference books, manuscripts, periodicals, videos, and audio materials that are maintained or provided by an institution. The "library" can include both print and non-print materials and generally make use of a variety of dispersed electronic digital databases. An accredited degree-granting institution is expected to have—or to provide learners ready access to—a reasonably rich array of supplemental information resources that are related to and enhance the content of the subject matter offered to students.

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

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

**Needs Assessment**
A process for determining and addressing needs or "gaps" between current conditions and desired conditions, often used for improvement in individuals, education/training, organizations, or communities (e.g. expected career or learning outcomes). An institution should complete a "needs assessment" before developing a new program. The curriculum development team should research and compare similar in-residence and distance education programs. The needs assessment should assess industry trends, knowledge, and competencies

required for the field of study, professional organizations related to the field, obstacles to success in the field, the demand and pay for the field, adaptability of the topic to distance education, and availability of job opportunities, if applicable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Professional Doctoral Degree**
A post-master's graduate-level degree that prepares individuals through internships, practical application of training, and/or specialized certifications for professional practice (such as the

Doctor of Business Administration), as opposed to research methodologies that are associated with academic doctoral degrees (such as the Doctor of Philosophy).

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

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

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

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

**Scholarship (academic)**
The rigorous and systematic pursuit of knowledge, inquiry, and intellectual achievement, typically involving research, discovery, integration, application, analysis, critical thinking, and teaching, culminating in the dissemination of findings through recognized academic channels. Scholarship encompasses a wide range of activities, including:

- Conducting original research.
- Analyzing existing knowledge or literature.
- Publishing in peer-reviewed journals.
- Presenting at academic conferences.
- Contributing to the advancement of a discipline or field.

Scholarship is not limited to traditional academic disciplines like history or physics—it also includes intellectual and creative work in professional schools (like medicine, law, business, education) and non-traditional fields (like the arts, community engagement, or practice-based disciplines).

**Scholarship (financial)**
Financial contribution that is awarded a student based on a merit or need. Merit based scholarships must be based on definable achievement at the time of enrollment or within the program of study. Merit based scholarship decisions must be made by qualified individuals using an institution approved rubric. Need based scholarship must be based on a discernable and consistent economic standard. All other tuition reductions are considered discounts.

**Self-Evaluation**

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

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

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

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

**Strategic Planning**
The integrated planning that links the mission, priorities, people, and institutional operations in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making, and action. Strategic planning shapes and guides the entire institution as it evolves over time and within its educational community. The strategic planning process provides institutions with the structure needed to achieve their mission while identifying and committing the resources necessary to achieve strategic initiatives. The process allows institutions to objectively evaluate and plan for challenges and threats while maximizing opportunities and enhancing strengths.

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

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

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

**Subscription Tuition**
A flat-rate tuition charge applicable to a defined period of time (days, months, or other specified interval) during which students can complete varying amounts of educational coursework without incurring additional tuition charges based on the amount of coursework completed.

**Syllabus**
A document or webpage containing relevant information about a course that commonly includes:

- course number and course title
- instructional contact hours/credits
- course description
- course prerequisites and/or corequisites
- instructional methods
- course objectives or measurable course learning outcomes
- required instructional materials
- a topical outline of the course (including learning activities, examinations, assignments, and due dates)
- assessment and/or grading criteria
- instructor/Faculty name(s) and contact information, and
- additional information that students may need (attendance policy, communication protocols, technology requirements, academic honesty policy, disability policy and procedures, etc.) may also be included in a syllabus, or may be located in an alternate, easily accessible location for students.

**Synchronous**
Instructional communication or interaction between faculty and students that occurs at the same time.

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

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

**Term**
A designated period of time during which educational instruction and learning is offered by an educational institution, such as a school or university. Terms may vary in length and structure depending on the institution and its academic calendar.

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

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