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:

_____

_____

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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.