Part Three: Accreditation Standards

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

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

Standard I: Mission

Description

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

Core Components

A. Description of the Mission

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

B. Review and Publication of the Mission

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

Standard II: Governance

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

Core Components

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

B. Reputation of Institution, Owners, Governing Board Members, Administrators, and Other Officials
The institution and its owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators possess sound reputations, a record of integrity, and ethical conduct in their professional activities, business operations, and relations. The institution's name is free from any association with activity that could damage the reputation of the DEAC accrediting process, such as illegal actions, fraud, unethical conduct, or mistreatment of consumers. The institution's owners, governing board members, officials, and administrators shall comply with the institution's policies and procedures governing conflicts of interest and other applicable rules of conduct.

C. Succession Plan
The institution has a written plan that describes the process that it follows to sustain operations in the event a leadership succession is necessary. The plan identifies specific people, committees, or boards responsible for carrying out the operation of the institution during the transition period. The plan includes a business continuity structure that the institution can implement immediately. The institution reviews the plan on an annual basis and revises as needed.

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

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

Standard III: Institutional Planning and Effectiveness

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

Core Components

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

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

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

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

Standard IV: Academic Achievement

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

Core Components

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

B. Direct Measures
The institution evaluates student achievement using student outcome indicators (e.g., completion rates) and other measures that it determines to be appropriate relative to its mission and educational offerings, including post-completion measures. The institution maintains systematic and ongoing processes for assessing student achievement, analyzes aggregated and disaggregated data, and documents that the results meet both internal and external benchmarks, including those comparable to courses or programs offered at peer DEAC-accredited institutions. Data on student achievement is collected on a continuous basis and evaluated annually.

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

Standard V: Academic Program Requirements

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

Core Components

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

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

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

B. General Education Requirements for Undergraduate Degrees

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

C. Alternative Program Structures

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

D. Program Advisory Council(s)

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

Standard VI: Curriculum Development

Description

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

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

Core Components

A. Program Curricula Development

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

B. Instructional Design and Materials

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

C. Academic Units of Measurement

The institution documents policies and procedures used to define and calculate the chosen academic unit of measurement. The framework for academic units must be supported by research and consistent with the program learning outcomes. Academic units are measured by credit hours or competencies. Academic unit measurements for all delivery modalities and program types must clearly show that each program is delivered with at least 51 percent distance education. The institution measures and documents the amount of time it takes the average student to achieve learning outcomes and specifies the academic engagement and preparation time. If academic units are measured in clock hours, the institution documents its implementation and application of policies and procedures for determining clock hours awarded for its courses and programs. A clock hour is one instructional hour. One instructional hour is defined as 50 minutes of instruction in a 60-minute period.

D. Credit Hour Definition

Semester and quarter credit hours are equivalent to the commonly accepted and traditionally defined units of academic measurement. Academic degree or academic credit-bearing distance education courses are measured by the learning outcomes normally achieved through 45 hours of student work for one semester credit or 30 hours of student work for one quarter credit. One credit/semester hour is 15 hours of academic engagement and 30 hours of preparation. One quarter hour credit is 10 hours of academic engagement and 20 hours of preparation.

Standard VII: Learning Materials, Resources, and Research Support

Description

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

Core Components

A. General Learning Resources

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

B. Course-Level Learning Resources

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

C. Library and Research Support

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

D. Evaluation, Review, and Revision

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

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

Standard VIII: Academic Delivery

Description

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

Core Components

A. Curricula Delivery

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

B. Supporting Academic Technologies

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

Standard IX: Academic Leadership and Staffing

Description

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

Core Components

A. Academic Leadership

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

B. Faculty Qualifications

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. Faculty Training

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

D. Professional Development and Scholarship

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

Standard X: Academic Policies

Description

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

Core Components

A. Admissions Criteria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Transfer Credit

The institution implements a fair and equitable transfer credit policy that is published in the catalog. The steps for requesting transfer credit are clear and disclose the documentation required for review. Students may appeal transfer credit decisions using published procedures. The institution clearly discloses that the transfer of institutional credits to other institutions is at the discretion of the other institution.

C. Prior Learning Assessment

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

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

D. Student Integrity and Academic Honesty

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

E. Grading Polices

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

F. Satisfactory Academic Progress

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

G. Institutional Review Board

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

Standard XI: Recruitment and Enrollment

Description

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

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

Core Components

A. Student Recruitment

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

B. Verification of Student Identity

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

C. Compulsory Age

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

D. Enrollment Agreements

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

E. Financial Disclosures

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

F. Scholarships

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

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

G. Discounts

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

H. Admission Process

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

Standard XII: Student Support Services

Description

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

Core Components

A. Student Inquiries and Requests for Assistance

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

B. Individual Differences

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

C. Student Support

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

Standard XIII: Fair Practices

Description

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

Core Components

A. Confidentiality and Privacy

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

B. Complaint Procedures

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. Cancellations and Withdrawals

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

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

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

D. Refunds

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

E. Performance Disclosures

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

F. Advertising and Promotion

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

G. Institution and Course Accredited-Status Recognition

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

- Accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- DEAC Accredited

H. Truth in Lending

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

Standard XIV: Finance

Description

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

Core Components

A. Financial Practices

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

prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) in the United States of America or the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). In the event the operations of the institution are supported in whole or in part by a parent company or a third party, the Commission may require audited financial statements from the parent or third party to demonstrate that the entity possesses sufficient financial resources to provide the institution continued financial sustainability. If the institution's financial performance is included within the parent corporation's statements, a supplemental schedule for the individual institution is appended to the parent statement, and inter-company transactions are clearly identified and defined. The institution's budgeting processes demonstrate that current and future budgeted operating results are sufficient to allow the institution to accomplish its mission and goals.

B. Financial Management

Individuals overseeing the fiscal and budgeting processes are qualified by education and experience. The institution maintains adequate administrative staff and other resources to operate effectively within fiscal and budgeting constraints, consistent with its representations of the scope and quality of its educational offerings as guided by its mission statement and strategic plan. Any risk that exists is adequately monitored, manageable, and insured. The institution has adequate administrative resources for effective operations, and at least one person is qualified and able to prepare accurate financial reports in a timely manner. Documentation protocols and controls are in place to assure that finances are properly managed, monitored, and protected.

C. Financial Stability and Sustainability

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

D. Financial Reporting

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

E. Collections

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

Standard XV: Facilities and Records Maintenance

Description

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

Core Components

A. Records Protection

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

B. Record Retention

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

C. Facilities, Equipment, and Supplies

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

D. Protection of Physical Sites and Virtual Infrastructure

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

E. In-Residence Program Component

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