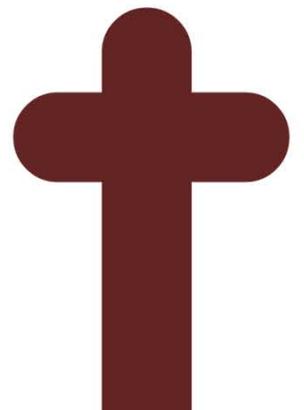


# Proposed TRACS Accreditation Manual

*Comment Period through December 15, 2017*

*(Send comments electronically to [comments@tracs.org](mailto:comments@tracs.org))*



# TRACS RESTATED ACCREDITATION MANUAL

Comment period November 6 – December 15, 2017

Accreditation Commission Final Vote April 2018

Training begins summer of 2018

All institutions that begin the application process under the current TRACS Accreditation Standards and Evaluative Criteria will be permitted the option of completing under the existing manual or of moving to the new restated standards.

## I. ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

The Accreditation Requirements are built out of approximately 80 standards that are divided into sixteen categories:

1. Faith Statement
2. Mission and Name
3. Institutional Objectives
4. Institutional Integrity
5. Operational Authority
6. Organizational Structure
7. Publications and Policies
8. Educational Programs
9. Faculty
10. Student Services
11. Financial Operations
12. Institutional Assessment
13. Strategic Planning
14. Library and Learning Resources
15. Facilities and Equipment
16. Health and Security

**NOTE:** In addition to its obligation to demonstrate and maintain compliance with the TRACS Accreditation Requirements, any institution that holds Candidate or Accredited status must also demonstrate that it meets the following Federal Requirements regardless of whether the institution participates in the Title IV program.

## II. FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The Federal Requirements that apply to an institution must be met in order for an institution to be approved for a change of status and in many cases must be available to the public.

1. Definition of a Credit Hour \*
2. Program Length and Cost \*
3. Student Complaints
4. Transfer of Credit Policies \*
5. a. Distance Education must meet the federal definition of 'regular and substantive interaction with students'  
b. Correspondence Education must not be used to calculate Federal Student Aid or mixed with Distance Education
6. Verification of Student Identity
7. Student Privacy
8. Public Information \*
9. Advertising and Recruitment Materials \*
10. Fraud and Abuse
11. Student Achievement \*
12. Title IV Participation and Compliance

\* *Public Information*

### **On-site Evaluation Teams will have a new level of analysis in the Team Report:**

Currently there are three levels of analysis available for the TRACS peer evaluators: commendation, recommendation, and suggestion. The TRACS Restated Accreditation Manual will allow for a more critical level of concern by the Visiting Team. This will be related to possible non-compliance with an Institutional Eligibility Requirement (IER), TRACS Accreditation Requirement, or a Federal Requirement. Officially it will be a FINDING OF POSSIBLE NON-COMPLIANCE. Institutions will still have an opportunity to correct errors with its institutional response.

## Expectations for Accreditation

Institutions that have submitted an application for membership with the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) are considered affiliates of, but not members of TRACS. An approved Applicant is an institution whose application has been approved by the Application Review Committee.

In order for an Applicant institution to obtain Candidate status with TRACS, the institution is required to demonstrate compliance with the established Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs). IERs are noted as specific Standards within each Accreditation Requirement and specified Federal Requirements. IERs are noted in **bold print**. Candidate institutions must demonstrate compliance with all of the Accreditation Requirements and with all applicable Federal Requirements within five years of being granted Candidate status. (See the TRACS definition of *Institutional Eligibility Requirements*).

Accredited institutions are required to maintain and demonstrate compliance with all of the Accreditation Requirements and with all applicable Federal Requirements. Accredited institutions found to be in non-compliance with Accreditation Requirements or applicable Federal Requirements must bring such areas of deficiency into compliance within the timeframe prescribed by the TRACS Accreditation Commission.

Specific information regarding the processes involved in the various stages of TRACS accreditation can be found in the TRACS publication, *“Steps Toward Accreditation”*.

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#### 1. Faith Statement

The Faith Statement of an institution defines its Christian nature by affirming those doctrinal matters to be true which are found in the TRACS Biblical Foundations Statement and which

identify it as part of the evangelical protestant tradition in education. It is to be written so as to conform to the historic creeds and statements of Christianity, and thus reflect a careful and precise theological statement, but also accurately state the current position of the institution as set down by the institution's Board and administration. In addition, it should be written lucidly in order to inform prospective students, faculty, administrators and Board members, as well as external constituencies, regarding the religious identity of the institution.

**1.1 The institution has a Faith Statement which is readily available, and included in appropriate official publications. (IER)**

1.2 The institution's Board approves and periodically reviews the institution's Faith Statement.

## 2. Mission and Name

The institution's mission is appropriate to Christian higher education, is consistent with its charter or other operating authority, and is implemented in a manner that complies with accreditation expectations. The institution's mission gives direction to its activities and provides a basis for the assessment and enhancement of the institution's effectiveness. The mission sets forth the specific educational role of the institution with regard to its intended audience.

The name of the institution is accurate, descriptive, and appropriate for its stated purpose. The use of "institute," "college," "university," "seminary," "theological school," "graduate school," et al., is in keeping with the general and national use of such nomenclature (and appropriate to the programs approved by TRACS) in order to enable a consumer to correctly understand the scope and nature of the institution.

**2.1 The institution has a Mission Statement which is current and comprehensive, an accurate guide for the institution's operations, approved and periodically reviewed by the institution's Board, communicated to the institution's constituencies, and accurately reflective of its Faith Statement. (IER)**

2.2 The name of the institution is appropriate to its mission and reflects national norms for programs offered.

## 3. Institutional Objectives

Institutional Objectives are formulated which are consistent with the institution's Mission, its scope of recognition with TRACS, and its Faith Statement.

**3.1 The institution has adopted clearly defined written Institutional Objectives which are consistent with the institution's mission, stated in measurable terms, and approved and periodically reviewed by the institution's Board. (IER)**

## 4. Institutional Integrity

The institution defines itself by a set of values which are central to its mission and objectives. These values and standards result in institutional operations that exemplify integrity.

**4.1 The institution operates with integrity and is represented accurately and honestly to students, the public, and to TRACS. (IER)**

## 5. Operational Authority

The institution has the legal authority to operate an institution of higher education.

- 5.1 The institution has legal authorization to operate from all appropriate governmental agencies (state, federal, territory, country) in which it is located and has filed copies of such authorizations with TRACS. If a governmental requirement conflicts with a TRACS Standard, the institution will be deemed in compliance with the TRACS Standard as long as it is in compliance with the governmental requirement. (IER)**

## 6. Organizational Structure

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and objectives and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organizational structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and, where appropriate, research activity. Such governance assures provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component. The institution has sufficient independence from any external entity, such that it is solely accountable for meeting accreditation requirements.

- 6.1 The institution's Board, of not less than 5 voting members, is the legally constituted body that holds the institution in trust and has appropriate oversight in matters of policy, operation and evaluation. (IER)**
- 6.2 The institution's Board appoints and periodically evaluates a full-time Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is not the Chair of the institution's Board or a Chair of any of its sub-committees, and who is granted the legal authority to fulfill the tasks defined in the written job description for this position as the individual responsible for carrying out published Board policies and procedures. (IER)**
- 6.3 A full-time Chief Academic Officer (CAO) is in place who has the credentials, experience, and competence to lead the institution's educational programs toward quality outcomes and the CAO is periodically evaluated. (IER)**
- 6.4 Organizational structure is maintained which clearly depicts lines of administrative responsibility.
- 6.5 Administrative Leadership positions have written job descriptions which are used as a basis for performance evaluations.
- 6.6 Qualified administrative personnel and leadership team members are sufficient in number and competence to provide direction to the major operational areas of the institution and are periodically evaluated.
- 6.7 The institution's Board has a policy regarding conflicts of interest for Board members.
- 6.8 The institution's Board has appropriate autonomy.
- 6.9 The institution's Board is responsible for the financial stability of the institution and approves the annual operating budget.

- 6.10 The institution's Board is responsible for establishing and providing appropriate oversight of affiliated corporate entities and auxiliary services.
- 6.11 A clear distinction exists between the policy-making functions of the institution's Board and the role of the institution's CEO and administration to carry out such policies.
- 6.12 The support staff is sufficient in number and competence to adequately support the administrative, academic, and support functions of the institution. Members of the support staff are periodically evaluated in relation to a written job description.

## 7. Publications and Policies

The institution produces and maintains current, accurate, and consistent publications (including its website) which appropriately reflect the institution's mission and operations.

The institution develops and implements policies which are comprehensive and provide the guidance necessary for the institution to function appropriately.

- 7.1 **The institution's publications are Board approved and include at least the following: *Board Manual, Policies Manual, Catalog(s), Faculty Handbook, Student Handbook.* (IER)**
- 7.2 The institution's publications are current, clear, factually accurate, and consistent with each other.
- 7.3 Policies and procedures are comprehensive in scope and consistent with TRACS Standards.
- 7.4 Policies are adopted for the evaluation of Board members and all employees with clear due process procedures. Documentation of proceedings are made available to TRACS upon request.

## 8. Educational Programs

The institution's educational program(s) have as their principle focus the education and academic preparation of students within a distinctly Christian context. Educational programs are derived from recognized fields of study normally found at the postsecondary level and require designated courses of study with clearly outlined procedures for completing the programs successfully.

- 8.1 **The institution has at least one academic program at the diploma, certificate, associate, bachelor, masters, and/or doctoral level (based on at least 60 semester credit hours or equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the bachelor level, or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the graduate or professional level). (IER)**
- 8.2 **The curriculum clearly relates to the mission and objectives of the institution. (IER)**
- 8.3 **Academic programs have adequate enrollment to facilitate student interaction appropriate to quality instruction and to financially sustain the program. (IER)**
- 8.4 **Undergraduate academic programs offered include an appropriate general education core. General education courses are not narrowly focused nor are**

**they directed toward a specific occupation or profession. Undergraduate programs include a minimum of 30 semester hours, with at least 3 semester hours, in each of the humanities/fine arts, behavioral/ social sciences, and natural science/math. Associate programs include a minimum of 15 semester hours in general education. (IER)**

- 8.5 Clearly defined student learning outcomes are established at the course, program and institutional levels, written in measurable terms and reflected in all aspects of academic and support services.
- 8.6 The institution's Branch Campuses are operated in compliance with TRACS requirements (see definition of a Branch campus), all relevant laws, and provide comprehensive services to students according to the programs offered.
- 8.7 The institution's Teaching Sites are operated in compliance with TRACS requirements (see definition of a Teaching Site), all relevant laws, and provide appropriate services.
- 8.8 A process is established for faculty-led curriculum development, review, modification, and assessment of the educational program.
- 8.9 The academic programs offered by the institution impart a common core of knowledge, which enhances students educationally and/or vocationally. The programs are consistent with commonly accepted standards and are appropriate for their educational level.
- 8.10 A process is in place for the systematic and regular evaluation of all academic programs which includes an analysis of the accomplishments of program outcomes, retention rates, completion/graduation rates, job placement rates, the results of licensing or certification examinations (when appropriate), or other measures of evidence.
- 8.11 The institution uses information resources and technology as an integral part of student education, enabling levels of proficiency appropriate to their degree and program or professional field of study.
- 8.12 Students earn at least 25% of the credit hours required for a degree at the institution awarding the degree.
- 8.13 Graduate programs reflect post-baccalaureate level requirements and rigor and extend the intellectual maturity of the students and demonstrate a clear distinction between Bachelor level, Master level and Doctoral level work.

## **9. Faculty**

The institution employs dedicated and qualified faculty who possess the appropriate academic credentials and professional experience. The fundamental contribution of the faculty is to provide effective instruction and advice and to do so in a manner that makes the curriculum vital, with reference to the mission and objectives of the institution. An additional function of the faculty is to advise the administration and board in the formulation of academic policies involving such matters as curriculum, admissions, advising, student services, and faculty welfare.

- 9.1 **The institution employs at least one full-time, contracted, academically and spiritually qualified faculty member for each program area to teach and perform related duties, such as advising and the curricular oversight needed for the institution to fulfill its mission. (IER)**
- 9.2 The institution employs a sufficient number of appropriately credentialed faculty members who support the mission and objectives of the institution, perform all required faculty responsibilities (including the development and review of curriculum), ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs, and fulfill their role in governance.
- 9.3 At least twenty-five percent (25%) of courses in each major at the undergraduate level are taught by faculty having a terminal degree.
- 9.4 The institution provides its faculty with on-going opportunities for professional and spiritual development for the growth of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners.
- 9.5 The institution maintains a functioning faculty organization which is guided by a set of regulations, led by elected officers, meets regularly, and is involved in the formulation of curricular and academic matters, including faculty policies.
- 9.6 The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accordance with published criteria.
- 9.7 The institution ensures academic freedom for faculty.

## 10. Student Services

The institution provides the services necessary to promote the spiritual, intellectual and personal development of its students. It recruits, admits, enrolls, and endeavors to ensure the success of its students and offers the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve such success.

- 10.1 **The institution offers an array of student services that are appropriate to its mission and objectives and which address the needs of its students regardless of location or the mode of delivery of educational programs. (IER)**
- 10.2 The institution maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially with provision for a secure backup of all records.
- 10.3 The institution maintains a sufficient number of qualified staff, with appropriate education and experience in the student services area to accomplish the institution's mission.
- 10.4 The institution offers student academic advising and career counseling appropriate to its educational programs.
- 10.5 The institution provides appropriate student financial aid services directed by a qualified individual.
- 10.6 The institution's CEO exercises appropriate academic, administrative, fiscal, and health and safety controls over the institution's intercollegiate athletics program.

## 11. Financial Operations

The institution will exhibit financial stability and integrity as a means of demonstrating the viability of the institution. The institution's financial resources will be adequate to carry out its mission and support its programs and activities for the foreseeable future.

- 11.1 **The institution's finances are adequate to support the staffing, facilities, equipment, materials, and support services for the approved programs. (IER)**
- 11.2 **A certified external audit of the institution's financial statements is conducted each year in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards. Final audit reports along with all management letters are submitted to the TRACS office annually within 5 months of the close of the institution's fiscal year. (See definition of *Certified External Audit*.) Audits demonstrate a recent history of financial stability. (See Definition of *Financial Stability*.) Institutions organized as non-profit or not-for-profit entities must have their audits prepared using the "net asset" model of accounting consistent with the policies and procedures provided by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) in its document, *Audit and Accounting Guide: Not-for-Profit Organizations: 2017*, or any later enacted version. (IER)**
- 11.3 **The institution demonstrates credit lines or other liquid reserves adequate to ensure operations at all times. (IER)**
- 11.4 The institution exercises complete control over all its financial resources.
- 11.5 The institution has sufficient competent finance staff, led by a professionally qualified Chief Financial Officer (CFO).
- 11.6 Planning and budgeting support the institution's mission and objectives and are clearly connected.
- 11.7 The institution, at both the administrative and Board levels, regularly and systematically evaluates its fiscal condition and management of its financial operations including its use of appropriate internal and external mechanisms which ensure financial stability including enrollment management, diversification of revenue resources, and realistic budgeting.

## 12. Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive *Assessment Plan* as a means of evaluating its effectiveness in accomplishing its mission and objectives. The *Assessment Plan* describes the processes utilized in the evaluation of all foundational and operational areas of the institution and includes the identification of outcomes, assessments to determine the extent to which these outcomes are achieved, and evidence of institutional improvement based on an analysis of assessment results.

- 12.1 **The institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive *Assessment Plan* which includes all aspects of the institution. (IER)**

**12.2 The institution provides a systematic assessment of whether or not student learning outcomes at the institution, program and course levels are appropriate to its educational mission. (IER)**

12.3 The institution utilizes multiple approaches (qualitative and quantitative methods and direct and indirect measures) for assessing student learning, including information both internal and external to the institution.

## **13. Strategic Planning**

The institution's planning processes are all-inclusive in nature and lead to the development of a comprehensive institutional *Strategic Plan*. The *Strategic Plan* will address such factors as educational programs, student enrollment, staffing projections, finances, facilities, equipment, and policies and procedures for operation.

The strategic planning processes include both short-range (1-2 years) and long-range (3-5 years) projections and goal setting. These processes will identify priorities, set goals and timelines, and identify individuals responsible for implementation.

The institution utilizes the results of assessments in broad-based continuous planning and evaluation processes, and incorporates them into overall strategic planning processes.

**13.1 The institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive, Board approved *Strategic Plan* which is based on both internal and external factors. (IER)**

13.2 The *Strategic Plan* aligns human and physical resources with the institution's mission, objectives and budget.

## **14. Library and Learning Resources**

The institution maintains library and learning resources (including physical as well as digital resources) which are adequate to support the mission of the institution, the educational programs offered, and to promote the intellectual, spiritual, and cultural development of faculty and students. Additionally, the institution provides appropriate access to these learning resources and to relevant facilities, equipment, supplies and services.

**14.1 The institution furnishes library and learning resources and related services appropriate to support the institution's mission, academic programs, and administrative functions, through strategic, operational, and financial planning. These resources and services are made available to all students regardless of location or mode of course delivery. (IER)**

**14.2 The institution employs an adequate number of professionally qualified staff who administer the institution's library and learning resources. (IER)**

14.3 The institution provides sufficient and consistent financial support to ensure the adequacy of its library and learning resources and for the effective maintenance and improvement of its instructional and information technology.

**15. Facilities and Equipment**

The institution maintains physical facilities and necessary equipment which are adequate to serve the institution's mission and objectives. Facilities, regardless of location, meet all state and local requirements and provide an atmosphere for safe and effective learning.

**15.1 The institution provides, maintains, and controls adequate facilities and equipment, (both on and off-campus) that appropriately serve the needs of the educational programs, support services, and other mission related activities. (IER)**

15.2 Information technology is sufficient to provide appropriate support for administrative, management, staff, and student functions across the full scope of the institution's operations.

**16. Health and Security**

The institution provides a healthy, safe, and secure environment for the institution's personnel and students, regardless of location.

**16.1 Appropriate health and security measures, including an Emergency Plan, are in place for all institutional facilities and activities. (IER)**

## II. Federal Requirements

In addition to its obligation to demonstrate and maintain compliance with the Accreditation Requirements, any institution that holds Candidate or Accredited status must also demonstrate that it meets the following Federal Requirements regardless of whether the institution participates in Title IV programs. Institutions not participating in Title IV programs are not required to meet Title IV requirements.

TRACS staff, peer evaluators (Evaluation Teams and / or Focus Teams), and the Accreditation Commission will determine whether or not an institution demonstrates compliance with Federal Requirements. Failure to comply with Federal Requirements will be reported to the United States Department of Education and will trigger an Institutional Staff Review per TRACS policy.

### 17.1 Credit Hours: The institution's award of credit hours and length must meet national norms and federal requirements.

The institution is responsible to award credit hours in accordance with accepted practices in higher education and in compliance with the Federal definition of a credit hour which is as follows: "A credit hour for Federal purposes is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates some minimum amount of student work reflective of the amount of worked expected in a Carnegie unit: key phrases being "institutionally established," "equivalency," "reasonable approximate," and "minimum amount."

The institution must have policies determining credit hours awarded for course and programs. Determining a credit hour should be equivalent to the following: (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or (2) at least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward to the award of credit hours.

The institution must demonstrate peer review of a credit hour for courses regardless of mode of delivery. TRACS staff, peer evaluators, and/or the TRACS Accreditation Commission will review the assignment of a credit hour to determine the reliability and accuracy of the assignment and process. (IER)

### 17.2 Program Length and Cost: The institution's programs must be appropriate to the institution's mission and objectives and must demonstrate that program lengths are comparable to accredited institutions of higher education.

Program specific fees and tuition must be published and appropriate for the program length and objectives. (IER)

### 17.3 Student Complaints: Institutions must record student complaints. Records must be kept of student complaints received, the process for addressing the

student complaints, and the manner in which the student complaint was handled in accordance with the institution's policies and procedures. The institution's student complaint policy must include, at a minimum: a method for receiving confidential student input, clear step-by-step procedures for due process, an appropriate office that securely maintains all information and records of complaints, appeals, proceedings, and instructions for filing a complaint with TRACS and any other relevant government agencies. (IER)

- 17.4 **Transfer of Credit Policies:** The institution has published policies and procedures for accepting transfer of credits. Published policies include criteria for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit transfer, credit by examination, experiential learning (undergraduate only), advanced placement, and professional certificates. Policies and practice must ensure that course work is at the collegiate level. The institution is responsible for the quality of course work and credit given on the transcript.

The policies and procedures must be published and communicated to those who administer the policies. Articulation agreements must be disclosed and the institution listed with which the agreement is made. (IER)

- 17.5 **Distance Education and Correspondence Education:** The institution demonstrates that programs and courses offered via Distance Education and Correspondence Education are in compliance with the federal definition of Distance Education and Correspondence Education (Title IV funds are available for Distance Education only):

***Distance Education Definition:*** Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above.

***Correspondence Education Definition:*** Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor; interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and correspondence education is not distance education. (IER)

- 17.6 **Verification of Student Identity:** An institution offering Distance Education or Correspondence Education as stated in federal definitions must have a process to verify that the student who registers for a Distance Education program or course or a Correspondence Education program or course is the same student who participates in, completes, and receives credit. Methods to verify the student include but are not limited to: a secure login or passcode, proctored

examinations, or new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying the identity of the student.

Institutions must notify the student at the time of registration of any additional charges associated with the verification of student identity. (IER)

- 17.7 **Student Privacy:** The institution has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in Distance Education or Correspondence Education programs or courses. (IER)
- 17.8 **Public Information:** The institution makes the following information available to students and the public through the institution's Catalog(s), website and/or other methods: academic calendar, grading policies, refund policies, admission policies, program requirements, and information regarding tuition and fees. (IER)
- 17.9 **Advertising and Recruitment Materials:** The institution's advertising and recruitment materials must accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. (IER)
- 17.10 **Fraud and Abuse:** The institution must not engage in fraud or abuse and practices or procedures that are designed to deceive students or falsify information to students. (IER)
- 17.11 **Student Achievement:** The institution's assessment of student achievement includes retention rates, course completion rates, graduation rates, job placement rates, and state or other licensing examinations. Student achievement information is made available to the public. (IER)
- 17.12 **Title IV Participation:** The institution maintains and demonstrates compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent *Higher Education Act* as amended.

In evaluating the institution's compliance with Title IV program responsibilities, the TRACS Accreditation Commission will rely on documentation forwarded to TRACS by the U.S. Secretary of Education supported by letters of authorization on file from relevant agencies indicating certification of eligibility and Federal Aid audits (IER)