

# Accreditation Manual



## Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools

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# Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools

## Accreditation Manual 2021 Edition

Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) is recognized by the United States Department of Education (ED), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) as a national accrediting agency for Christian postsecondary institutions that offer certificates, diplomas, associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees, including distance education.

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# INTRODUCTION

This *Accreditation Manual* is designed to communicate the expectations for accreditation that have been established by the Accreditation Commission of the *Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools* (TRACS). These expectations, which are listed under sixteen Accreditation Requirements and under specific Federal Requirements, will serve to guide institutions in accreditation processes.

The manual applies to institutions seeking Candidate (Pre-Accredited) status, Accredited status and Reaffirmation of Accredited status. Questions regarding the accreditation process should be directed to the TRACS office.

The Accreditation Requirements and their associated Standards may be modified by the TRACS Accreditation Commission, but only after opportunities for comment on any proposed changes have been provided to all parties and institutions significantly affected.

## Purpose

The principal purpose of TRACS is to provide accreditation for Christian postsecondary institutions that offer a Certificate, Diploma, or Degree (Associate, Baccalaureate, Graduate or Post-Graduate) at both the Candidate and Accredited level. Such recognition ensures the institution's academic quality, financial stability, and student support services and allows the institution and their students the benefits of participating in federally funded programs as appropriate.

TRACS is a voluntary, non-profit, self-governing organization of Christian postsecondary institutions. TRACS is recognized as a national institutional accrediting agency by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

TRACS was established by a group of educators in 1979, the purpose of which was to promote the welfare, interests, and development of quality Christian postsecondary institutions whose mission is characterized by a distinctively Christian orientation. While TRACS encourages each affiliated institution to develop its own distinctives, TRACS expects institutions to provide quality postsecondary education within the context of a Christian worldview, with emphasis on high academic standards, integrity, practical application, and spiritual development.

The TRACS Accreditation Commission is solely responsible to carry out all accreditation activities and has final authority regarding all accreditation actions. The TRACS Accreditation Commission formulates and implements all policies, procedures, and Standards utilized in the evaluation and accreditation processes.

## Objectives

- To foster excellence and quality in Christian postsecondary education through the development of policies, procedures, and Standards for assessing educational effectiveness leading to enhanced educational quality
- To ensure the consistent application of Accreditation Requirements, applicable Federal Requirements, and the Standards associated with each
- To develop an accreditation process that requires continuous institutional self-study, assessment, and self-improvement

- To serve as an accrediting agency that recognizes institutions demonstrating quality through compliance with the Accreditation Requirements and applicable Federal Requirements at the Candidate or Accredited level
- To provide guidance and assistance to both established and developing institutions
- To provide Candidate and Accredited institutions the opportunity to participate in federal programs authorized under Title IV and other government programs as applicable
- To assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution evaluated by TRACS 1) has clearly defined and appropriate educational objectives and outcomes, 2) has established conditions under which educational outcomes are being achieved at an acceptable level with reference to the Accreditation Requirements and applicable Federal Requirements, and 3) is so organized, staffed and supported that it can be expected to continue to offer quality education in the foreseeable future
- To establish and encourage cooperative relationships among its institutions that promote common interests both nationally and internationally

## The Role and Value of Accreditation

In the United States, accreditation is voluntarily sought by institutions and is conferred by independent, autonomous bodies. Voluntary, non-governmental, institutional accreditation, as practiced by TRACS and other recognized accrediting agencies, is uniquely characteristic of American education. In other countries, the development, maintenance, control, and supervision of educational standards is often a governmental function.

Principal concerns of accreditation are the improvement of educational quality and the assurance to the public that affiliated institutions meet established expectations. While no institution in the United States is required to seek accreditation, the benefits leading to both self-improvement and self-enhancement provide sufficient motivation for most institutions to do so. Other recognized advantages include reciprocity in the transfer of credit from one accredited institution to another. In addition, a contributing factor in accreditation for many institutions is the fact that governmental and other agencies rely on Candidate or Accredited status with a recognized accrediting agency as a qualification for participation in certain financial aid programs.

For purposes of determining eligibility for federal government assistance under certain legislation, the United States Department of Education (ED) is required to publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies that it determines to be reliable authorities as to the quality of training offered by educational institutions after initial recognition. Criteria for recognition and guidelines have been established by the U.S. Secretary of Education to be used in recognition of accrediting agencies.

The approval process of all recognized accrediting agencies follows a common pattern. Standards and procedures, to be followed in the accreditation process, are developed by those involved in the work of an accrediting agency and are used in evaluating an institution to determine its educational effectiveness in fulfilling its stated mission. TRACS has established Accreditation Requirements and associated Standards which are designed to guide institutions through all stages of accreditation from initial application through reaffirmation as a result of an institutional self-study process. The process requires a self-study by the institution, followed by an on-site Evaluation Team Visit by peer evaluators, and a subsequent review and

decision by the TRACS Accreditation Commission. The basic purpose of the accrediting agencies, including TRACS, is to attest to the fact that an institution is achieving its stated goals and objectives and is meeting the Standards established by that agency, as well as applicable Federal Requirements.

TRACS has established a review schedule for Accreditation Requirements, Standards, policies, and procedures under the guidance of a Standards Review Committee. After such review, appropriate changes are made in the light of ensuing recommendations, but only after opportunity for comments on any proposed change have been provided to all parties significantly affected. Recommendations for improvements in the Standards, policies, and procedures are encouraged and welcomed by the TRACS Accreditation Commission.

## Scope

Institutional Categories: TRACS serves Christian postsecondary institutions at both the Candidate and Accredited level. TRACS accredits the institution as a whole, and as such, accreditation processes concern all aspects of the institution.

Institutions are classified according to the degree programs offered. The following is the official classification for TRACS institutions:

- Category I Institutions offering Certificates, Diplomas, and Associate degrees
- Category II Institutions offering Bachelor's degrees
- Category III Institutions offering Master's degrees
- Category IV Institutions offering Specialist's degrees and Doctorate degrees

Institutions will be listed by the category approved by the TRACS Accreditation Commission.

Institutions that are initially awarded Candidate status by the Accreditation Commission at specific categories (I, II, III, and IV) may only move to another category by filing for a Substantive Change and by being approved by the Accreditation Commission to operate at a different level.

Geographical Territory: The geographic territory of TRACS currently consists of the United States and its territories, plus other locations as determined by the TRACS Accreditation Commission. Accreditation expectations are applied consistently to all institutions, regardless of the geographical location of the institution.

# DEFINITIONS

These definitions provide insight concerning terms which are used in this *Accreditation Manual* and the associated accreditation processes. A full listing of all TRACS definitions can be found in BP102 in the *TRACS Policies and Procedures Manual*.

**Ability-to-Benefit Student:** A student who does not meet the regular admissions criteria for the institution or program, who is admitted on a provisional basis and is provided the opportunity and assistance to succeed.

**Accredited Institution:** An institution accredited by an accrediting agency approved by the U.S. Department of Education or an equivalent foreign government agency.

**Applicant Institution:** An institution whose application has been approved by the TRACS Applicant Review Committee (ARC).

**Basic Compliance:** A determination of full compliance with all Standards related to the Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs) and the ability to demonstrate compliance with all Standards within the period of Candidacy.

**Branch Campus:** An additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.

**Candidate Institution:** An institution which has been granted pre-accredited status by action of the Accreditation Commission indicating that the institution has been found in *Basic Compliance*.

**Certified External Audit:** An audit performed in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) and federal guidelines by auditors who are not inappropriately involved with the institution (e.g., auditors are not members of the governing board, not employees of the institution, not under contract to the institution for services other than the audit, or not involved in the decision-making activity, etc.).

**Correspondence Education:** 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. **[NOTE: This definition of Correspondence Education is provided to ensure that the institution's Distance Education meets the definition of Distance Education and does not fall to the level of Correspondence Education. Correspondence Education is not reviewed by TRACS and is not included in an institution's scope of recognition with TRACS.]**

**Corresponding Institution:** An institution which has made initial contact with TRACS.

**Distance Education:** 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. [**NOTE: The offering of courses and/or programs via Distance Education requires TRACS approval prior to implementation. See Institutional Change Form at [tracs.org](http://tracs.org).**]

**Financial Stability:** Institutions are able to evidence a history of finances adequate to support the existing programs and to assure the continuity of the essential operations beyond the date when current students would complete their degree programs. Events which indicate a lack of financial stability include negative Change(s) in Total Net Assets or Retained Earnings, enrollment decline of 20% or more, notification from the Department of Education of composite score below 1.5, the use of pledges to achieve a positive change in Net Assets without Donor Restrictions or the required liquidity is substantially depleted.

**Focus Visit:** The visiting of an institution by either a small team or staff required for the review of a specific issue.

**Full-Time Chief Academic Officer:** An individual who has a full-time contract with the institution; whose possesses the professional experience and competence for the assigned position, whose earned degrees from accredited institutions are appropriate to the assigned responsibilities; whose salary is fixed and not contingent; whose job responsibilities are specifically spelled out in a board approved job description; whose primary professional employment is with the institution; and whose outside professional activities do not detract from the specified job responsibilities.

**Full-Time Chief Executive Officer:** An individual who has a full-time contract with the institution; whose possesses the professional experience and competence for the assigned position, whose salary is fixed and not contingent; whose job responsibilities are specifically spelled out in a board approved job description; whose primary professional employment is with the institution; and whose outside professional activities do not detract from the specified job responsibilities.

**Full-Time Faculty:** A faculty member who has a full-time contract with the institution; whose earned degrees from accredited institutions are directly related to courses to be taught; whose salary is fixed and not contingent; whose job responsibilities are specifically spelled out in a board approved job description; whose primary professional employment is with the institution; and whose outside professional activities do not detract from the specified job responsibilities.

**Full-Time Faculty Sufficiency:** Adherence to best practices would generally lead the institution to employ at least one full-time faculty member for each program area offered. Ultimately, compliance with the requirement for the institution to employ a "sufficient number of full-time faculty" (Standard 9.1) is demonstrated when the institution employs an adequate number of qualified full-time faculty to carry out the following duties: design, develop, and evaluate the curriculum required for the educational programs offered; offer instruction for the courses required for completion of the programs within the timeframes prescribed; identify and assess appropriate learning outcomes at the program and course levels and; offer appropriate academic advising.

**Institutional Independence:** The Board of the institution has sufficient independence from any external entity (including financial independence), such that it is solely accountable for meeting the TRACS Standards.

**Institutional Eligibility Requirements:** The Standards associated with The TRACS Accreditation Requirements and the Standards noted as Federal Requirements with which an institution must demonstrate compliance in order to be accepted as an *Applicant* and subsequently authorized to begin the Self-Study process for consideration by the Accreditation Commission for Candidate level recognition.

**Monitoring:** A requirement imposed on an institution by the President of TRACS to submit compliance information (e.g., monthly financial reports) as requested by staff.

**National Norms:** a reference to practices, terms, or policies which are common in American higher education.

**Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty:** A faculty member who has a contract with the institution to teach one or more specifically identified courses for one or more specified academic terms; whose earned degrees from accredited institutions are directly related to courses to be taught; and whose job responsibilities are specifically spelled out in a board approved job description. The institution may designate these faculty members as part-time or adjunct; however, only those contracted to teach in the current or most recently completed academic year may be included in any published faculty listing.

**Program Area:** A general group of academic disciplines in which one or more degree programs, certificates or diplomas may be offered.

**Professionally Qualified Librarian:** An individual who has earned a Master's in Library Science, or its equivalent, from an accredited institution and who is capable of leading library development and operations.

**Teaching Site:** A location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers less than 50% of any educational program. No student can earn 50% or more of any educational program at any degree level at a teaching site.

# EXPECTATIONS FOR ACCREDITATION

Institutions that have submitted an application for membership with the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) are considered affiliates, 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”*.

The TRACS Accreditation Requirements and noted Federal Requirements which comprise the Expectations for Accreditation apply equally to all institutions seeking and/or holding membership with TRACS regardless of the methodology of course delivery (face-to-face, Distance Education, and/or hybrid modalities).

## I. Accreditation Requirements

The Accreditation Requirements 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

## 1. Faith Statement

The Faith Statement of an institution defines its Christian nature by affirming those primary doctrinal matters that are held by the institution. Institutions are not required to duplicate the TRACS Biblical Foundations Statement, but the institution's Faith Statement should identify it as part of the evangelical protestant tradition in higher 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 forth 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)**
- 5.2 If the institution offers courses and/or programs via Distance Education, the institution has legal authorization to offer such courses and/or programs in the locations wherever the Distance Education student declares his/her residency. Further, the institution's Distance Education offerings meet all applicable TRACS Accreditation and Federal Requirements. (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, has appropriate oversight in matters of policy, operation and evaluation, and exists without conflicts of interest. (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 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), whether offered face-to-face, via Distance Education, or by hybrid modalities, 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 degree 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 bachelor degree programs include a minimum of 30 semester hours in general education, with at least 3 semester hours, in each of the humanities/fine arts, behavioral/ social sciences, and natural science/math. Associate degree 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 through 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 a sufficient number of full-time, academically, and spiritually qualified faculty for the programs it offers 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 faculty the institution employs 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 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 accurate and complete 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 under the standards applicable to financial audits contained in the Government Auditing Standards and in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America or comparable auditing standards for institutions located in foreign jurisdictions. 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, or comparable international guidance for such audits. (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. It includes the identification of outcomes and assessments to determine the extent to which these outcomes are achieved and leads to 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. 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 oversee the institution's library and learning resources and related services. (IER)
- 14.3 The institution provides sufficient and consistent financial support to ensure the adequacy of its library and learning resources.

## 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.

Applicable Federal Regulation Numbers are cited with each requirement.

- 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) - §600.2, §602.24(f)

- 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) - §602.16(a)(1)viii

- 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) - §602.16(a)(1)ix

- 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, prior learning assessment, advanced placement, and professional certificates. Policies and practices 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) - §602.24(e)

- 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. (see TRACS Accreditation Standard 5.2)

*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) - §602.3

*[NOTE: This definition for Correspondence Education is provided to ensure that the institution's Distance Education meets the definition of Distance Education and does not fall to the level of Correspondence Education. Correspondence Education is not reviewed by TRACS and is not included in an institution's scope of recognition with TRACS.]*

- 17.6 Verification of Student Identity: An institution offering Distance Education as stated in Federal definitions must have a process to verify that the student who registers for a Distance 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) - §602.17(g)1

- 17.7 Student Privacy: The institution has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in Distance Education programs or courses. (IER) - §602.17(g)2

- 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) - §602.16(a)(1)vii

- 17.9 Advertising and Recruitment Materials: The institution's advertising and recruitment materials must accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. (IER) - §602.16(a)(1)vii
- 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) - §602.27(6)
- 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) - §602.16(a)(1)i
- 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) - §602.16(a)(1)x, §602.27(a)6,7