



Quality Assurance in North America Higher and Theological Education

WOCATI 2011

Accreditation in the United States

“Accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to examine colleges, universities and programs for the purposes of **quality assurance** and **quality improvement**.”

CHEA, 2008

- Private
- Nonprofit
- Peer-based

Types of accrediting organizations:

- Regional agencies, covering the six geographic regions of the country (8)
- Faith-related agencies (4)
- Career-related agencies, often dealing with for-profit institutions (7)
- Programmatic / specialized organizations, reviewing academic programs within colleges and universities (62)



Regional accrediting agencies

The “regionals” are the primary accreditors for not-for-profit colleges and universities, both public and independent

- Middle States
- New England (2)
- Southern
- North Central
- Western (2)
- North Western





■ National faith-related accrediting agencies

- Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)
 - 101 institutions “of Biblical higher education” offering undergraduate degrees. 35 also offer graduate degrees.
- Association for Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools
 - 64 institutions offering degrees in Rabbinical and Talmudic education
- Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS)
 - 242 institutions offering graduate professional and graduate academic degrees
- Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS)
 - 53 Christian post-secondary schools, including liberal arts colleges, graduate schools, and Bible colleges. 31 offer graduate degrees.



Stages in the accreditation process

1. Eligibility
2. Self-study
3. On-site team visit
4. Team report
5. Decisions and appeals
6. Monitoring

With some variation, all accrediting organizations follow the basic pattern set by these six stages.

Example from one accrediting agency

The “criteria for accreditation” are organized under five major headings:

1. Mission and integrity
2. Preparation for the future
3. Student learning and effective teaching
4. Acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge
5. Engagement and service



Sample standard:

3. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

Examples of evidence:

- Assessment of student learning provides evidence at multiple levels: course, program, and institutional.
- Assessment of student learning includes multiple direct and indirect measures of student learning.





The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is a membership organization of more than 260 graduate schools that conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines.

The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits the schools and approves the degree programs they offer.

The accrediting standards are in the process of redevelopment. New institutional standards were approved in 2010; new degree standards will be approved in 2012.





Institutional Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

- Purpose, planning, evaluation
- Institutional integrity
- Theological curriculum: learning, teaching, research
- Library and information resources
- Faculty
- Student recruitment, admission, services, placement
- Authority and governance
- Institutional resources
- Multiple locations and distance education



Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

3. Theological curriculum: learning, teaching, research

A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity.

- 3.1.1. [The goals of the theological curriculum] and the processes and practices leading to their attainment are normally interwoven and should not be separate from one another.



Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

3.2.1 Learning

3.2.1.2 Learning should cultivate scholarly discourse and result in the ability to think critically and constructively, conduct research, use library resources, and engage in the practice of ministry.

3.2.1.2 Learning should foster, in addition to the acquisition of knowledge, the capacity to understand and assess one's tradition and identity and to integrate materials from various theological disciplines and modes of instructional engagement in ways that enhance ministry and cultivate emotional and spiritual maturity.





Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

3.3.3 Involvement with diverse publics

3.3.3.2 Theological scholarship informs and enriches the reflective life of the church. The school should demonstrate awareness of the diverse manifestations of religious community encompassed by the term *church*: congregations, denominations, parachurch organizations, broad confessional traditions, and the church catholic. Library collections, courses, and degree programs should represent the historical breadth, cultural difference, confessional diversity, and global scope of Christian life and thought.





Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

6. Faculty

6.1.1 Faculty members shall possess the appropriate credentials for graduate theological education, normally demonstrated by the attainment of a research doctorate.

6.2.5 Schools shall develop and implement mechanisms for evaluating faculty performance, including teaching competence and the use of educational technology. These mechanisms should involve faculty members and students as well as administrators.





Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

8. Authority and Governance

8.2.1 Each school shall articulate a structure and process of governance that appropriately reflects the collegial nature of theological education.

8.2.2 Shared governance follows from the collegial nature of theological education. Unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of the governing board, faculty, administrators, students, and other identified delegated authorities should be defined in a way that allows all partners to exercise their mandated or delegated leadership.





Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

9. Institutional resources

9.8 Instructional technology resources. Institutions using instructional technology to enhance face-to-face courses and/or provide on-line only courses shall be intentional in addressing matters of coherence between educational values and choice of media, recognizing that the learning goals of graduate education should guide the choice of digital resources, that teaching and learning maintains its focus on the formation and knowledge of religious leaders, and that the school is utilizing its resources in ways that most effectively accomplish its purposes.





Degree Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

- Basic programs oriented toward ministerial leadership
 - MDiv, MRE, MCE, MA in Religious Education, MA in [specialized ministry], MCM, MSM, MM in Church Music, MA in Church Music
- Basic programs oriented toward general theological studies
 - MA, MAR, MA [theological studies], MTS
- Advanced programs oriented toward ministerial leadership
 - DMin, DEdMin, EdD, DMiss, DMA, DCM, SMD,
- Advanced programs primarily oriented toward theological research and teaching
 - ThM, STM, PhD, ThD



Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

A.1 Purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and educational assessment

A1.3 Goals of the program shall be delineated as discernable learning outcomes congruent with the institution's mission and purpose. Institutions shall demonstrate that students have achieved the goals or learning outcomes of the degree program by means of direct and indirect evidence of student learning.





Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

A.2 Program content

A2.1.2 Religious heritage

A2.1.3 Cultural context

A2.1.3.2 MDiv education shall engage students with the global character of the church as well as ministry in the multifaith and multicultural contexts of North American society and in other contemporary settings.

A2.1.4 Personal and spiritual formation

A2.1.5 Capacity for ministerial and public leadership



Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

A.3 Educational resources and learning strategies

A.3.1 Location

A.3.1.1 MDiv education has a complex goal: the personal, vocational, spiritual, and academic formation of the student. Because of the importance of a comprehensive community of learning, the MDiv cannot be viewed simply as an accumulation of courses or of individual independent work. The location, or learning environment, can occur in multiple patterns that include, but are not limited to, in person faculty-student instructional contact on a campus or extension site, online/technologically mediated forms of instruction, supervised ministry practice, and formats that blend instructional modalities.



Sample Standards



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

A.3 Educational resources and learning strategies

A.3.1 Location

A.3.1.1 (cont) Institutions shall demonstrate that students are engaged in a community of learning whereby faculty and student have significant opportunities for interaction, peer learning, development of pastoral skills, supervised experiences of ministry, and growth in personal, spiritual formation.





Master of Divinity (MDiv)

A.4 Admission

A.4.1 The MDiv is a postbaccalaureate degree.

Admission requirements shall include (1) a baccalaureate degree from an institution accredited by . . . ; (2) evidence of the commitment and qualities desired for pastoral leadership; and (3) the academic ability to engage in graduate education.





Issues:



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

Residency and distance: How long must a student live on a school's main campus? What percentage of the total degree time can be undertaken at a distance?

Duration: What length of study should be required for specific degree programs? Or, how long does it take to prepare/form women and men for pastoral ministry?

Resources vs. outcomes: To what extent should those concerned with quality assurance concentrate on assessment of learning outcomes rather than resources?





■ A few thoughts on quality:

- Alignment
 - institutional mission
 - resources
 - student outcomes
 - Engagement
 - Integration
 - Cultural competence
 - De-linking Eurocentrism
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