

SELF-STUDY HANDBOOK

CHAPTER FIVE

*Guidelines for Using the Commission Standards
in Institutional Evaluation*



The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

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Introduction

The Standards of Accreditation (“Standards”) provide a basis for evaluating theological schools accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of ATS (“Commission”). The primary purpose of this chapter of the *Self-Study Handbook* is to help both self-study committee members and accreditation evaluation committee members to think about the use of the Standards in accreditation review. To engage this reflection, the first section discusses how characteristics of the Standards influence their use in institutional evaluation, the second section explores how the general model of evaluation in the Standards informs the self-study and accreditation peer processes, and the third section lists questions for each area of the Standards that schools can ask in the context of their self-studies and evaluation committee members can ask in the context of their evaluation.

The structure of the Standards is three-tiered, each tier providing support for the next level. The foundational tier consists of the *General Institutional Standards*, the middle tier is the *Educational Standard*, and the final tier holds the *Degree Program Standards*.

The *General Institutional Standards* (Standards 1 through 8) focus on issues that are true for all theological schools regardless of the educational programs they offer: purpose, planning, and evaluation; institutional integrity; theological scholarship (learning, teaching, and research); library and information resources; faculty; student recruitment, admissions, services, borrowing, and placement; authority and governance; and institutional resources. These Standards articulate the expectation that schools will apply the *Educational Standard* and *Degree Program Standards* on the foundation of a sound institutional context. The

General Institutional Standards address concerns that affect all theological schools regardless of the kind of educational programs they offer. The structure of the *General Institutional Standards* provides an institutional framework (purpose, planning, and evaluation; institutional integrity; governance; and institutional resources [Standards 1, 2, 7, and 8]) that surrounds the primary activities of a theological school (theological scholarship; library; faculty, and students [Standards 3, 4, 5, and 6]).

The *Educational Standard* (ES) identifies general educational qualities that support the expectations of particular degree programs. This underlayment includes setting forth the four types and the nomenclature of degree programs, the educational context (campus-based, extension, and distance education and individual instruction), the assessment of student learning outcomes, and nondegree programs.

The *Degree Program Standards* (A through J) are divided into four categories: basic programs oriented toward ministerial leadership, basic programs oriented toward general theological studies, advanced programs oriented toward ministerial leadership, and advanced programs primarily oriented toward theological research and teaching. For each degree, the Standards address (1) purpose, goals, learning outcomes, and educational assessment; (2) program content; (3) educational resources and learning strategies; and (4) admissions.

The interpretation of a specific Degree Program Standard depends on the *Educational Standard* in addition to the particular Degree Program Standard, and the interpretation of both depends on the *General Institutional Standards*.

Characteristics of the Standards That Influence Evaluation

Accrediting standards, across different accrediting agencies, are not very standard. They have different textual forms, reflect different understandings of the function of accreditation, and lead to different patterns of evaluation. Understanding the characteristics of the ATS Commission Standards will support their appropriate use in institutional evaluation.

Evaluation and the Types of Textual Material in the Standards

The Standards contain three different types of textual material, and each has different evaluative uses. The Standards contain (1) descriptions of quality in theological education, (2) statements about normative expectations of accredited schools, and (3) mandatory requirements to ensure compliance with ethical or regulatory expectations.

Descriptions of Quality. The underlying, central feature of the Standards is their definition of institutional and educational quality, as it is understood at a particular time, in the context of particular forces in North American religious life, and in light of the broader community of higher education. A significant portion of the text of the Standards describes *characteristics of theological education to which institutions should aspire*.

Most of Standard 3, for example, is devoted to a description of quality in “theological scholarship,” as understood by the community of theological schools comprising the Commission on Accrediting of ATS. The Standard describes theological scholarship in terms of the goals of the theological curriculum and of the activities of learning, teaching, and research, and it discusses, at some length, the characteristics of theological scholarship. This type of text is a “standard” because it defines quality for a central component of theological education. Few self-study committees will be able to read Standard 3 and conclude that scholarship at their school reflects all the characteristics described in the Standard. They will more likely conclude that it does not, but that if it did, theological scholarship at their school would be better.

The accrediting evaluation task, in the context of this kind of material in a Standard, is for the school to determine which of the qualities

in the Standard are most evident in the school and which are inadequately present or absent altogether. Following this determination, the school has the task of developing strategies to cultivate characteristics of quality that are not evident and strategies to ensure the continued presence of characteristics that do exist.

Commission accreditation is not based on a school's demonstration that it exhibits all the characteristics of quality described by the Standards, but it is based, in part, on the school's reasonable and disciplined efforts to develop the characteristics most in need of cultivation, while maintaining the strengths it already exhibits. The Standards hold up many ideals, and accreditation does not assume that every school will exhibit all these ideals. It does assume that schools are committed to improvement and that the qualities in the Standards, however ideal, identify appropriate goals for these efforts at improvement.

Normative Expectations. The Standards also contain *normative expectations for accredited graduate, professional theological schools*. These characteristics should be present in a school accredited by the Commission, and their absence poses an accrediting concern. These normative expectations are often embedded in the longer descriptions of quality because they are best understood in the context of the Standards' definition of quality.

For example, the description of characteristics of quality in theological scholarship (Standard 3) contains some normative expectations about theological scholarship. According to the Standards, "Freedom of Inquiry" (3.3.2) is not just an ideal to which the school should aspire but rather a fundamental requirement: "Schools shall uphold the freedom of inquiry necessary for genuine and faithful scholarship, articulate their understanding of that freedom, formally adopt policies to implement that understanding and ensure procedural fairness, and carefully adhere to those policies." This statement is a normative expectation; freedom of inquiry as understood by a school should be present in an accredited school, and its absence raises accreditation concerns.

All normative expectations in the Standards include the word *shall*. These normative expectations embrace a wide range of institutional behavior (for example, in the statement on freedom of inquiry,

institutions shall “uphold freedom of inquiry,” “articulate their understanding,” “formally adopt policies,” and “carefully adhere”). The evaluation task—both for the school in self-study and for the accreditation evaluation committee—is to investigate the range of policies, understandings, and implementation of the normative expectations in the school. Normative expectations constitute the type of text most often associated with accrediting standards. They are a “standard” because they identify characteristics required of accredited schools. A school is accredited by the Commission not only because it seeks appropriate patterns of improvement (the description of characteristics of quality noted above) but also because it meets basic requirements that have been judged by the community of theological schools to be necessary for graduate, professional theological education.

Mandatory Requirements. A third type of textual material in the Standards consists of *mandatory requirements that reflect regulatory or ethical expectations*. These mandatory requirements typically occur as stand-alone statements in the text of the Standards and reflect either regulatory requirements of authorities outside the member schools, such as governmental agencies, or normative ethical guidelines that are true for any organization related to the Christian or Jewish traditions, like being honest and treating persons fairly.

Unlike the normative expectations described above, mandatory requirements usually require a single, discrete institutional behavior or policy. For example, “The school shall ensure that all published materials . . . accurately represent the institution . . . Wherever appropriate, published institutional documents shall employ gender-inclusive language with reference to persons” (2.3). Either published materials are accurate, in terms of the expectations of this mandatory requirement, or they are not. If they are not, they can easily be put right. In the case of “Institutions shall publish all requirements for degree programs . . .” (6.3.6), the requirements for degree programs are either published accurately or not, and if they are not, they can easily be corrected. This type of text leads to a simple evaluative task: determining whether the school does or does not comply with the requirement.

The Standards have relatively few of these mandatory requirements. In self-studies, schools should audit their institutional policies and behaviors to affirm their compliance. In accreditation evaluations, committees should confirm the school’s compliance. The

mandatory compliance statements are: 1.2.2.2; 2.2; 2.3; 2.7; 2.9; 6.3.1; 6.3.4; 6.3.5; 6.3.6; 6.3.8; 6.4.1; and ES.6.4.4. In addition, the ATS Commission *Policies and Procedures* contain three provisions with equal force (VI.D.4, VII.A.4, and X.A.2).

Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards

The Standards organize these various types of text in two ways. The first, and most obvious, is by the patterns of educational and institutional life: the purpose of the school, its central activities (conducting educational programs involving teaching, learning, and research), the resources necessary to accomplish educational and institutional purposes (faculty, governance, library, financial, and other resources), and the characteristics of the degree programs it offers. The second, and less obvious organizational pattern, is by major, recurring themes woven throughout the Standards, including

- a priority on planning and evaluation,
- the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines,
- the importance of freedom of inquiry for teaching and learning,
- the globalization of theological education, and
- technology.

These recurring themes could have been included in the Standards as discrete sections, but various deliberations about quality in theological education led to the conclusion that these characteristics are best understood as themes that find expression in a wide range of institutional and educational efforts. Each of these five themes is introduced at one point (evaluation, 1.2.2 and 1.2.3; racial/ethnic inclusion, 2.5, and gender inclusion, 2.6; freedom of inquiry, 3.3.2; globalization, 3.3.4; and technology, 8.8) and subsequently addressed in many other sections. For example, globalization is introduced and defined in Standard 3, “The Theological Curriculum: Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship” (3.3.4), and it occurs in Standard 4, “Library and Information Resources” (4.1.2) and in Degree Program Standards, such as the Master of Divinity (A.2.3.2).

While the recurring references to these themes provide the most effective means for understanding their importance to the purposes

and practices of theological education, they pose some problems for the accreditation evaluation task. The themes make the Standards, by one way of reading them, seem repetitive, and the evaluation that follows the Standards one by one, redundant. The Standards require a reading that avoids this problem and a pattern of evaluation that simplifies a complex task, rather than further complicating it.

The most efficient way to conduct the evaluation with regard to these recurring themes is to assign responsibility for the evaluation of a theme to the self-study subcommittee that is responsible for the Standard in which the theme is introduced and described. For example, the self-study subcommittee responsible for reviewing the theological school in the context of Standard 2, “Institutional Integrity,” should evaluate the school’s overall efforts to “enhance participation and leadership of persons of color in theological education . . . (and) promote the participation and leadership of women in theological education within the framework of [its] stated purposes and theological commitments” (2.5 and 2.6). The subcommittee should be sensitive to the recurring nature of the theme (e.g., 4.5.2, 5.1.3, 6.2.4, 7.3.1.3, and 7.3.2.3) and consult with the subcommittees evaluating the school in terms of Standards 4, 5, 6, and 7. This pattern of review is not the only pattern, and schools may address these themes in a manner appropriate to the school, the force of the Standard, and the design of the self-study.

The primary guidance of the Board of Commissioners is that multiple self-study subcommittees should not treat the theme as if it were their primary responsibility. Each subcommittee may have a contribution to make to the evaluation, but only one should coordinate the comprehensive evaluation.

Evaluation and the Format of the Standards

The format of the Standards also influences evaluation. The Standards are organized tightly, and each concept that contributes to the meaning of a broader topic is numbered. Each numbered concept, however, is not a Standard; in fact, none of them is. A *standard* is the set of concepts related to a major topic of importance for graduate, professional theological education. “Library and Information Resources” is a Standard that is defined and described by the summary introduction followed by 21 statements organized under five headings.

The accreditation evaluation of a school's library and information resources is based on the Standard as a whole, not each of the concepts that constitute it.

Self-studies and accreditation committee reviews should not conduct a statement-by-statement review; they should be guided by the thrust of the Standard as a whole. A school is considered to meet a Standard adequately if it meets it generally and meets the specific expectations of statements that include "shall." Specific expectations not met provide the basis for improvement. If a school does not embody the expectations of the Standard in general, even though it may meet some particular expectations, the school is not considered to have met the Standard adequately. In the final analysis, an accrediting decision based on the Standards is a qualitative, professional judgment about a school and its educational programs. It is not a decision that merely reflects the compliance with numerous particular expectations.

Using the General Model of Evaluation in the Accreditation Review Process

Beginning in the decade before the turn of the century, Commission accreditation has reflected a growing focus on evaluation. In the adoption of the redeveloped Standards and revised *Procedures* in 1996, evaluation became a central feature of Commission accreditation, and it is one of the themes that occurs repeatedly throughout the Standards of Accreditation. It first appears in Standard 1, “Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation” (1.2.2 and 1.2.3), which describes the evaluation process in terms of four tasks. The four tasks of this general model are instructive for the accreditation evaluation process.

Tasks of the General Model of Evaluation

The first task of evaluation focuses on the goals of a theological school and asks two important questions. The first question is normative: *Are these the goals an accredited school should have for its various areas of work, in terms of the agreed-upon commitments of the community of theological schools expressed by the Standards?* The Standards of Accreditation define many goals for accredited theological schools. For example, Standards regarding theological scholarship, faculty, library, student services, institutional resources, extension education, distance education, and degree programs contain references to goals expected to be pursued by accredited schools. While the Standards give autonomous institutions wide latitude in the identification and implementation of particular goals, the Standards are normative, and institutional goals should be evaluated in light of the expectations expressed by the Standards. The second question is contextual: *Are these goals the right ones for this institution, at a particular point in its history, in the context of the issues confronting the particular religious communities it serves, and in light of the institution’s broader mission and purpose?* Periodically, good schools ask, for example, if their goals for degree programs are the ones most important for religious leadership, in a particular tradition, at a particular time. Accreditation evaluation committees need to review the school’s own analysis of its institutional and educational goals.

Once goals are properly established, the second task of the evaluation process is identifying the kind of qualitative or quantitative information that will be needed to assess the attainment of those goals. If a school has a system of information-gathering in place, the self-study

should review comprehensively the information that has been collected to determine (1) if the right kind of information is being collected, (2) if the information is being collected in usable forms, and (3) if the school is using the information effectively in the evaluation process. For many schools that have not developed an overall process of information-gathering, the self-study will need to begin by auditing the information that is available to determine what data will inform the self-study evaluation. In addition, the self-study should lead to recommendations about (1) the kinds of information that should be collected and (2) the institutional system necessary to collect the information over time. In the effort to identify appropriate forms of information-gathering, schools should not give priority to quantitative forms of information over qualitative ones. Numerical information is not necessarily more helpful or valuable than qualitative forms of information in determining the extent to which goals have been attained. Numerical information may be preferable for the evaluation of some goals (i.e., efforts to keep student debt at reasonable levels) and qualitative information for other goals (i.e., the extent to which the MDiv program has contributed to students' growth in theological understanding and moral sensitivity). "Good" information is the kind of information that provides an appropriate resource for the thoughtful evaluation of the goal to which it is related. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to determine whether or not a school has sufficient and appropriate information to support its self-study conclusions and recommendations and to provide a basis for determining the attainment of goals in the future.

The third task in the overall evaluation model is assessment, the task of analyzing and interpreting the information that has been collected. The term *assessment* refers to the activities involved in determining what the information or data mean and asks the question, *To what extent, and in what ways, have the goals been attained?* Information alone, no matter how rich or sophisticated, cannot answer this question. The important goals in theological education are complex and require human judgment and reflection, based on reasonable patterns of information. In many ways, assessment should be the primary activity of the self-study. *Self-study subcommittees should use much of their time assessing the ways in which, and the extent to which, the institution is achieving its goals. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility of confirming or not confirming the assessment made by the*

school in its self-study. One of the committee's primary evaluative functions is assessment: reviewing the conclusions the school has reached about itself on the basis of the goals the school has identified and the information gathered related to these goals. Does the external peer review of the accreditation committee lead to the same conclusions as the school's self-evaluation?

The final phase of the evaluation process involves making decisions about the goals and the activities that have been devised to achieve the goals. This is the process of translating the results of the assessment phase into appropriate plans of institutional action. In the context of the self-study, this task typically takes the form of recommendations regarding refining or establishing goals or designing or revising institutional or educational programs. Effective schools can identify appropriate actions or revised goals and, over time, demonstrate the capacity to implement them. Accreditation evaluation committees have the responsibility to review the capability of schools to implement the plans they have made in the past and, based on institutional information and ability, to implement the recommendations proposed in the self-study.

Cautions about the Use of the General Model of Evaluation

The general model of evaluation in the Standards describes an ongoing institutional activity that accredited schools must implement. The model, however, must be used thoughtfully and, in many ways, cautiously—both by schools and by accreditation committees.

First, this model is orderly and linear, and life in theological schools (described as “communities of faith and learning” in the Standards) is not always orderly and more likely nonlinear than linear. A compulsive and unreflective use of this model could turn the work of theological schools into technology-driven, cause-and-effect performance that would probably not serve well the theological vision or the most profound goals of a theological school.

Second, the general model of evaluation places a premium on goals and on the information that is needed to determine the extent to which the goals have been attained. One temptation in goal-oriented systems is to set goals at readily attainable levels instead of the levels truly required by the institution's purpose or to set goals for which

information can be easily obtained. The necessity of information for the evaluation process should not dictate the character of the goals.

Third, a good evaluation system should have some open space in it because some important institutional or educational effects may occur without intentional planning. The evaluative model, while it focuses on goal attainment, should be able to account for unanticipated positive outcomes of institutional and educational life.

With due caution, schools accredited by the ATS Commission need to implement comprehensive, continuous evaluative efforts, even though it is difficult work. The primary task of a theological school is theological scholarship (understood in the Standards as learning, teaching, and research), and the school cannot spend more energy on evaluation than on its primary task. However, evaluation is the only way the school will know if and how it is accomplishing its primary task, and evaluation is sufficiently important that it merits institutional energy and resources. Evaluation, in a school that understands its primary task theologically, is an aspect of stewardship. Evaluation helps a school to understand if it is accomplishing its important tasks: *Have students learned what needs to be learned? Has the teaching contributed to the formation and knowledge of religious leaders? Is the school using its scarce resources in the ways that most effectively help it accomplish its purpose?*

Questions to Prompt the Accreditation Evaluation Process

The accreditation process depends on thoughtful people who bring intellectual ability to the task of evaluating a school—both in the self-study and in the peer accreditation evaluation. The questions that follow are meant to prompt thought about the Standards of Accreditation, not to function as a protocol of questions for peer evaluators to ask or answers for schools to develop in the self-study. They provide an interrogative commentary on the Standards and a starting point for the evaluative efforts of the overall accreditation process. There is a simple, three part litany that underlies many of these questions: *What is the evaluative process? Is it effective? How is the school using the results?*

1 Purpose, Planning, and Evaluation

1.1 Purpose

- How does the purpose of this school relate to the understanding of purpose in the Standards of Accreditation?
- Is the purpose articulated in ways that define the school's confessional commitments and the implications of those commitments for the school's institutional and educational life?
- How does a theological school related to a college or university support the purpose of the larger institution of which it is a part?
- How does the school's understanding of its purpose distinguish it from other theological schools?
- What process has been used to arrive at the formal statement of purpose, and what constituencies contributed to its formation? How is it evaluated (i.e., How does the school know if its purpose is being accomplished?)
- How has the school's understanding of its purpose influenced recent decisions about institutional change or innovation?

1.2 Planning and Evaluation

- Subsections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3 anchor the first recurring theme (a priority on planning and assessment). See "Evaluation and Recurring

Themes in the Standards” above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of recurring themes.

- Subsection 1.2.2.2 is a mandatory requirement. See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements.
- How does the school’s purpose influence the allocation of institutional resources? Does the current use of resources reflect the priorities and commitments embodied in the institutional purpose?
- What is the school’s overall system of comprehensive evaluation? Does it include evaluation of employees, students, and members of the governing board? Does it also provide for the systematic evaluation of educational programs and institutional efforts?
- What evidence exists that the school has made changes in educational programs or institutional initiatives on the basis of the results of its evaluation efforts?

2 Institutional Integrity

- Subsections 2.2, 2.3, 2.7, and 2.9 are mandatory requirements. See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements. In addition, there is a mandatory expectation in the ATS Commission *Policies and Procedures* (VII.A.4) related to advertising of the comprehensive evaluation. This expectation should be treated in the same fashion as a mandatory requirement.
- Subsections 2.5 and 2.6 anchor the second recurring theme (the value of inclusion across racial/ethnic and gender lines). See “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of recurring themes.
- What efforts have been undertaken by this school to enhance participation of racial/ethnic minority persons in this school? How does the proportion of racial/ethnic minority representatives in the school compare with the population of racial/ethnic persons in the constituency served by the school?

- How is the school helping racial/ethnic majority students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to provide religious leadership in an increasingly racially and culturally diverse world?
- What is the confessional commitment of the school toward women in religious leadership roles, and what do these commitments mean for the faculty and student body?

3 Learning, Teaching, and Research: Theological Scholarship

- Subsections 3.2.2 and 3.3.4 anchor the third and fourth recurring themes (the importance of freedom of inquiry for teaching and learning and the globalization of theological education). Please see “Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards” above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of recurring themes.

3.1 and 3.2 Goals of the Theological Curriculum and Activities of Theological Scholarship

- How does the school demonstrate the importance it places on student learning?
- What practices does the school promote to encourage learning that fosters understanding of self and religious tradition?
- What evidence exists that students benefit from a variety of teaching methods and instructional attention to different learning styles?
- How does the school encourage and develop the teaching skills of its instructional staff?
- How does course development reflect patterns of faculty collaboration and interaction?
- How does the school know that individual courses contribute to the broader learning goals of the degree programs?
- Is there evidence that courses reflect new developments in society, in religious communities, and in disciplinary fields of study?

- How does the institution understand the kind of research its faculty members should undertake, and how does it support the research of the faculty?
- How do faculty members encourage students to develop research skills appropriate for their programs of study and future leadership?
- What is the quality of learning, teaching, and research at this school? What perceptions of quality form the basis of this assessment?

3.3 Characteristics of Theological Scholarship

- How do the activities of teaching, learning, and research in this school reflect collaborative efforts among faculty members, students, or others?
- How does this school understand the faculty's freedom of inquiry? In the context of this understanding, how is freedom of inquiry articulated in faculty/staff handbooks, in policies of the governing board, and in procedures for promotion and tenure?
- What evidence exists that the school carefully follows its policies? Is there any evidence that faculty members or students are denied the freedom of inquiry that is necessary for theological scholarship?
- What are the grounds for dismissal of faculty members from tenure or contract? Is there any evidence in the school's recent history as an employer that other grounds were used than the ones formally stated in policies?
- What publics does the school most want the scholarship of its faculty members or staff to reach? What support or encouragement does the school provide for reaching these various publics?
- How do teaching and learning at this school contribute to global awareness and concern? How are cross-cultural understandings cultivated by the courses or other educational events? How do course requirements, library collections, and faculty research give evidence of the school's commitments to globalization as it understands this value in theological education?

- How does this school encourage or provide support for students to engage in transcultural learning?
- How does this school ensure the ethical character of its educational activities?
- How does this school understand the broader concept of globalization, and what activities of the school provide support for meaningful attention to this issue, as understood by the school?

4 Library and Information Resources

4.1 Library Collections

- What is the school's collection development policy? On what basis has it been developed; how recently was it reviewed and updated; and what evidence exists that collection development is following the policy?
- How does the library balance print collections and access to electronic databases? What constituencies participate in the process of answering this question? What educational policies support this allocation?
- Does the library coordinate its collection development with other theological schools? What contributions does the school's library make to the collection needs of those other schools?
- What is the overall quality of the library's collection in view of the educational programs offered by the school and the research of its students and faculty members? How does the library come to this qualitative conclusion?
- What evidence does the library have that its resources are well and effectively used and that they are meeting the needs of students and faculty members?

4.2 and 4.3 Contribution to Teaching, Learning, and Research and to Curriculum Development

- What evidence does the school provide that the library actively supports the research interests of faculty members and students?
- How are professional library staff members involved in the school's process of curriculum development?

4.4 Administration and Leadership

- How does the chief administrator of the library participate in institutional planning, faculty decision making, and the institutional budgeting process? How do these patterns of participation contribute to the library's support for theological scholarship?
- How does the chief administrator of the library provide leadership for evaluation of the personnel who work in the library, the quality of the collection, and the educational contribution of library and information resources?

4.5 Resources

- How does the school determine the appropriate level of resources for the library, and what evidence exists that these resources are being provided by the institution at a level sufficient for the library to meet the educational needs of the school?
- How does the school determine the portion of its educational and general budget that should be devoted to library support, and what evidence exists that the school is regularly spending funds that have been budgeted for the library?
- In what ways are library facilities and space adequate and appropriate for the educational and research purposes of the library?

5 Faculty

5.1 Faculty Qualifications, Responsibilities, Development, and Employment

- What are the credentials of the faculty, and how does the school understand these credentials as appropriate for graduate, professional theological education?
- How does this institution understand and practice freedom of inquiry for faculty members? In what ways is this freedom ensured by institutional policy and practice?
- Are faculty members adequate in number to cover the range of disciplines included in the degree programs offered by the school? What are the areas of faculty strength and weakness, in terms of the composition of the faculty?

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- In what ways can the faculty be considered diverse, and how does this diversity support or impede the educational programs of the school?
- How does the faculty exercise its responsibility for the academic oversight of the programs of study? What evidence demonstrates that the faculty exercises this role effectively?
- What are the policies of this school regarding faculty rights and responsibilities and other conditions of academic employment? How is the effectiveness of these policies evaluated, and by whom?
- What procedures does this school have to retain qualified faculty members and to provide them the support necessary for long-term scholarly contribution? Are these procedures effective? Who, and on what basis, makes this determination?
- How do the workload expectations of faculty members balance time needed for students, for teaching and administration, for scholarly pursuits, and for contributions to church and community? Because there never seems to be enough time for all these pursuits in a theological school, have adequate and appropriate compromises been made? How does the institution guide or support faculty members in terms of balancing the various demands on faculty time?

5.2 Faculty Role in Teaching

- Do members of the faculty, administration, and student body perceive that faculty members have the freedom in the classroom necessary to discuss the subjects in which they have competence?
- In what ways does the school support the development of faculty members as teachers? What support does the school provide to encourage good teaching?
- What mechanisms does the school maintain to evaluate teaching effectiveness of faculty members, and are these mechanisms helpful?

5.3 Faculty Role in Student Learning

- How do faculty members participate in evaluation of student learning, and how does this pattern of evaluation contribute to the educational goals of the school?
- How do the routine practices of individual faculty members, as well as the entire faculty's oversight of the degree programs, contribute to students' capacity to think theologically, to integrate diverse learning objectives, and to accomplish the educational goals of the program of study?

5.4 Faculty Role in Theological Research

- What does the school expect of faculty members in terms of research? What support does the institution provide to help faculty members meet its expectations? Is this faculty engaged in research, and what is the quality of that research? By what standard does the school judge the quality of research?
- How do faculty members make available the results of their research?

6 Student Recruitment, Admission, Services, Borrowing, and Placement

- Subsections 6.1.2, 6.3.1, 6.3.4, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, and 6.3.8 are mandatory requirements. See "Evaluation and Recurring Themes in the Standards" above in this *Handbook* chapter for a discussion of the function and treatment of mandatory requirements.

6.1 Recruitment

- How does the school understand that its policies and practices of student recruitment reflect the purposes of the institution?
- How accurately and realistically do recruitment materials and processes convey the vocational possibilities related to degree programs for which students are being recruited?

6.2 Admission

- In what ways do criteria for admission support the cultivation of quality in religious leadership? What processes are employed to review the quality of candidates, and what strategies have been employed to enhance finding applicants of high quality?
- How do admission criteria vary according to the expectations of each of the degree programs offered, and are the resulting variations appropriate to the vocational and academic expectations of each degree?
- What admission efforts support commitments of the school to encourage diversity of the student body in areas such as race, ethnicity, region, denomination, gender, or disability?
- How do admission efforts and processes encourage an appropriate baccalaureate education?

6.3 Student Services

- What is the school's ongoing method of evaluation of student services, what has the evaluation revealed, and what actions have been taken in light of the evaluative conclusions reached?
- How does the school provide commensurate services to students wherever they are enrolled?
- How does the school's maintenance of student records ensure appropriate levels of confidentiality and privacy for students, appropriate access for school personnel, and security from physical or electronic destruction?
- How does the school demonstrate that its tuition and fees are appropriate for the degrees earned, in the context of income students can likely anticipate from the forms of religious service for which they are preparing?
- What process is in place to respond to complaints from students regarding issues related to Standards of Accreditation, including records of the complaints and the institutional responses to them?

6.4 Student Borrowing

- How does the school monitor student indebtedness and what institutional efforts are in place to counsel students, monitor over-borrowing, and cultivate financial responsibility among students?

6.5 Placement

- How does the school monitor the completion rate of students and their rate of placement in positions related to the degree programs they are completing? How has this monitoring influenced policies or decisions regarding admissions?
- How does the school advocate on behalf of graduates who are members of groups that have been disadvantaged in vocational employment because of race, ethnicity, gender, and disability?

7 Authority and Governance

7.1 Authority

- What is the structure and scope of the school's authority? What documents describe this structure, and are they clear and consistent? How appropriately is the authority delegated and how faithfully is the structure of authority implemented in the school's practices? How well does the structure serve the school's purpose and mission?

7.2 Governance

- What is the system of governance in this school? Does it relate appropriately to the school's legal, moral, institutional, or ecclesiastical pattern of authority?
- How does the school understand and implement patterns of sharing the governing process, and how are the unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of board, faculty, administrators, students, and others defined so that all partners exercise their mandated or delegated leadership?

7.3 Roles

7.3.1 Governing Board

- What evidence supports the expectation that the board maintains the integrity of the institution, including freedom from inappropriate internal or external control?
- How well has the board implemented its role of exercising proper fiduciary responsibility, financial oversight, and proper delegation of authority to administration and faculty and of ensuring procedural fairness and freedom of inquiry?
- How does the board monitor the qualifications of its members, and how do those members, in the context of the institution's purpose, reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, and gender?
- How does the governing board oversee ongoing institutional planning and evaluation and assess the degree to which the institution is achieving its goals and purpose? What indicators does the board use to determine if the purpose of the school is being met or not? How do these indicators relate to the purpose?
- What evidence exists that the governing board understands its role in policy formation and the necessity of delegating much of the implementation of that policy to administration and faculty?
- Is there any evidence that members of the board seek to exercise authority other than in the context of the board as a whole, or its delegated subgroups? If so, how has the board dealt with this problem?
- How does the board know that it is making good decisions on behalf of the school? What indicators does the board use in determining whether or not its decisions have been good?
- How does the board evaluate the performance of board members, and what effect does the evaluation process have on retention of current members or selection of new ones?

7.3.2–7.3.4 Administration, Faculty, Students

- How do administrative leaders seek to implement policies in ways that ensure fairness and embody the theological values the school articulates?
- How do the persons serving as administrative leaders reflect the institution's constituencies, accounting for the desirability of diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender?
- Do administrative leaders have adequate resources and authority to discharge their responsibilities? Is there a difference in formal and informal structures that impairs the ability of administrative leaders to perform their tasks?
- Are the structures of accountability clearly defined and implemented?
- How does the faculty know when it is functioning effectively as a governing body over those functions for which it has been delegated authority?
- How does the faculty contribute to the institution's overall decision-making process?

8 Institutional Resources

8.1 Personnel

- How does the school seek to enhance the quality of the lives of students, faculty members, administrators, staff, and support personnel?
- Are appropriate policies in place regarding procedural fairness, sexual harassment, and discrimination?

8.2 Financial Resources

- Has the school maintained economic equilibrium over the past three or more years? If not, what factors contributed to disequilibrium and what plans are in place to restore equilibrium?

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- Are the sources of income for this school reasonably stable, and are projected revenues sufficient to maintain the educational quality of the school? Is the projected revenue realistic?
- Has this school balanced expenditures and revenue, using a prudent rate of spending from endowment and other assets?
- At what rate is the school consuming the revenue generated by its endowment, and does this rate reflect realistic and prudent assumptions?
- If related to a larger institution, how does the theological school enhance the institution of which it is a part, and how does the larger institution understand the contribution of the theological school?
- Does the school employ accounting and reporting procedures generally used in US or Canadian higher education? Is financial information available to decision-makers in timely and appropriate form?
- Does the institution have an annual external, independent audit, and how has the institution attended to the report of the audit, in terms of both overall financial strength and management issues?
- How does the institution develop and implement its budget? Does this process result in prudent use of funds properly oriented to the school's purpose and mission?
- How does the school's governing board develop and oversee budget allocations and financial policies? Are finances subject to control or constraint by entities other than the governing board?
- Does the school have an appropriate and efficient process for managing the business affairs of the organization?
- How effective is the school's program of institutional advancement in developing financial resources?
- How does the institution ensure that donor wishes are respected in the use of donor-restricted funds?

8.3 Physical Resources

- How adequate are the school's physical resources for the purpose and programs of the school?
- How does the school attend to the safety and security needs of persons who work and study at the institution?
- How does the institution maintain, allocate, and ensure the adequacy of space for its institutional and educational activities?
- How do the physical resources of the school contribute to or detract from accomplishing the school's purpose and mission?

8.4 Institutional Information Technology Resources

- How adequately do the school's data and information resources support the efforts to evaluate institutional and educational effectiveness?
- How adequately does the institution's technology support its information needs?

8.5 Institutional Environment

- How does the overall institutional environment contribute to or detract from the attainment of the school's purpose and mission?

8.6 Cooperative Use of Resources

- If a school uses resources it does not own, how are the agreements for those resources maintained, and what guarantees does the school have that the resources will continue to be available as needed?

8.7 Clusters

- If the school participates in a cluster or consortium of theological schools, how does the cluster contribute to the attainment of the school's purpose and mission, and how does the school contribute to the purpose of the cluster?

- What is the purpose of the cluster, and is the cluster organized in ways appropriate to its purpose? How does the organization of the cluster add to or reduce the work of its constituent members?
- How is the work and effectiveness of the cluster reviewed and evaluated? What evidences of effectiveness are used as the criteria for evaluation?

8.8 Instructional Technology Resources

- How does the institution inform students of the necessary skills and mastery of technology required for full participation in the degree program to which they are seeking admission?
- How are “sufficient technical support services” determined and evaluated?

ES *Educational Standard Applicable to All Degree Programs*

- Most of the evaluation of the curriculum will be completed in the context of the Standards for each degree program (Standards A through J); however, the statements in the *Educational Standard* address some educational goals that should be evident across degree programs.
- How do the educational programs of this school seek to cultivate theological understanding, as described by the Standard?
- How will this school, in the context of its religious and intellectual traditions, know if students have a deepened spiritual awareness or growing moral sensibility?
- What educational practices does the school have to cultivate learning in which professional and scholarly skills, understanding of theological disciplines, and spiritual growth are intimately interwoven?

ES.1 Degree Programs and Nomenclature

- How does the school distinguish among the educational goals for different degree programs, incorporate these differences in curricular design, and communicate the distinctiveness of degree

programs to students? When the same courses are used for more than one degree program, how are their requirements adapted to meet the educational goals of the program toward which the course is being credited?

- How does the school determine that a sufficient community of peers exists for each of the degree programs it offers?
- Do the degree programs offered by the school follow the recommended nomenclature? If not, does the school have compelling reasons for the variation, and has the Board of Commissioners granted permission for the variation in nomenclature?
- How do the degree programs offered by the school clearly articulate their educational purposes in terms of the four broad categories of degree programs approved by the Commission?

ES.1.2 Basic Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership

ES.1.3 Basic Programs Oriented Toward General Theological Studies

ES.1.4 Advanced Programs Oriented Toward Ministerial Leadership

ES.1.5 Advanced Programs Primarily Oriented Toward Theological Research and Teaching

ES.1.6 Degree Program Standards

- Each degree offered by the school should be evaluated by the appropriate Degree Program Standard (A through J).
- Is the purpose of each degree program distinctive and coherent with the purpose of the Standard in which it is situated?
- Are the educational goals of each degree program appropriate, in the context of the relevant Standard (content), the mission of the institution, and the educational needs of the students?
- How are the educational goals of each degree program related to the leadership needs of the religious communities in which graduates will serve in ministry?

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- Are the learning outcomes for each degree program distinctive and clearly articulated?
- In what ways, and to what extent, are the educational goals of each degree program being met, as demonstrated by the outcomes assessment program of the institution?
- Does the curriculum of each degree program provide adequate exposure to the content areas set out for the program of study?
- Do the program requirements meet the Standards for duration and location?
- How adequate are the school's resources for each of the degree programs it offers, and in what ways, if any, do the resources needed for one program contribute to or detract from the resources needed by other programs?
- Are students who are admitted to each degree program properly qualified for the program for which admission was offered?
- This subsection contains a provision (1.6.1) for modified degree program requirements under certain conditions. If the institution is offering any degree programs with such modifications, what do its evaluative processes show with respect to achievement of the program's learning outcomes?

ES.2 Campus-based Education

- Does the institution provide the variety of resources in a common location required to support a community of learning as described by the Standards?

ES.2.1 Residency

- Does the institution provide the full array of services and resources to support in-person interactions, for example, with instructors, field education supervisors, and spiritual directors?

ES.3 Extension Education

- The issues identified in each of the eight *General Institutional Standards* are all present, though from a different perspective, in extension education activities. This subsection seeks to focus the

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General Institutional Standards with respect to the distinctive concerns of extension education.

- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of extension education in ways that are congruent with the institution's mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfill the purposes of the degree programs?
- How has the institution addressed the purposes of its extension site programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures? What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify its extension programs?
- How does the institution establish, approve, and review the programs of study and course curricula for extension education programs in ways that are consistent with its formal institutional policies and procedures?
- How does the institution ensure that library and information resources are appropriate and sufficient for the purposes of the extension program(s) and the needs of students at extension sites? If library resources and facilities of other institutions are used to meet the needs of extension education programs, how does the school demonstrate that those libraries offer the functional availability and adequacy of appropriate resources?
- Do the full-time faculty members share sufficient responsibility for teaching and academic oversight of extension education to ensure that the institution's goals and ethos are evident wherever the institution conducts its work?
- In what ways does the institution ensure that students in extension programs have access to appropriate services, including advisory and administrative support, program and vocational counseling, financial aid, placement, and academic records?
- Has the institution met the licensing regulations of the community in which the program is offered?

ES.4 Distance Education

- The issues identified in each of the eight *General Institutional Standards* are all present, though from a different perspective, in distance education courses and programs. This subsection seeks to focus the *General Institutional Standards* with respect to the distinctive concerns of distance education.
- There is a mandatory expectation in the ATS Commission *Policies and Procedures* (VI.D.4) that the institution will have a process by which it verifies that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. This expectation should be treated in the same fashion as a mandatory requirement. Does the institution have such a process in place?
- In what ways does the institution demonstrate that it has developed its programs of distance education in ways that are congruent with the institution's mission and purpose, appropriate to the students and context being served, and adequate to fulfill the purposes of the degree programs?
- In what ways, if any, is the institution's terminology inconsistent with the Standard's definition of distance education, (e.g., describing an extension site as "distance education" because it occurs at a distance from the main campus)?
- How has the institution included planning and evaluation processes for its distance education programs in its overall strategic planning and evaluation procedures? What evidence is there that the institution has used the results of its evaluation to modify either its distance education programs or its mission statement or both?
- In what ways does the school demonstrate how programs offered through the mode of distance education seek to meet the Standards of learning, teaching, and research described in Standard 3; the goals of the theological curriculum addressed in this Standard; requirements regarding library and information resources outlined in Standard 4; and the provisions for faculty control, involvement, and development described in Standard 5?
- How has the institution guarded against allowing the accumulation of distance education courses to constitute a significant portion of

a degree program that, as a result, lacks coherence, intentionality, and curricular design?

- How does the institution ensure that distance education programs provide students with appropriate opportunities for collaboration, personal development, interaction with faculty members and among peers within a community of learning, and supervised field or internship opportunities when appropriate to the degree program?
- In what ways does the school provide for faculty development and assistance, thus ensuring consistent, effective, and timely support?
- What procedures are in place to ensure that faculty members possess requisite credentials, demonstrate competence appropriate to the specific purposes of these instructional programs, and benefit from institutional practices regarding scholarly development and support for faculty research?
- How accurately do the school's recruitment efforts and publications represent the technological aspects of the distance education programs, including a description of the hardware and software used and the ability, skill, and access needed for students to participate satisfactorily in the program?
- How does the school integrate the administration of its distance education programs into its regular policies and procedures?

ES.5 Faculty-directed Individual Instruction

- What approval and monitoring procedures does the institution have in place to ensure that such instruction is limited to meeting "unique educational and student needs" and involves "substantive interaction between the student and the faculty member?"

ES.6 Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

- Does the institution's process for assessing student learning outcomes and degree program goals address each of the four components?
- Is there evidence of the alignment of individual course learning outcomes and degree program goals?

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- Do the measures of student learning provide both direct and indirect evidence?
- Do the procedures for collecting and assessing data related to student learning guard the confidentiality of student work?
- Do students and members of the faculty and governing board have clearly articulated roles in the process of assessing student learning outcomes?
- How are assessment results linked to curriculum and educational planning, institutional strategic planning, and resource allocation?

ES.7 Academic Guidelines: Admission, Transfer of Credits, Shared Credit in Degree Programs, and Advanced Standing

Each of the four elements in this subsection addresses a potential technical issue with regard to the operation of a school's educational program (exceptions to admissions requirements, transfer of credits, shared credit in degree programs, and advanced standing).

- The school is already required (2.9) to make its policy with respect to transfer of credits public. If it accepts transfer credits, do the consequential policies conform to the requirements of ES.7.2?
- If the other three elements of this subsection affect the school's policies and practices, does the school have effective mechanisms for evaluating each element on a regular basis?

ES.8 Nondegree Instructional Programs

- In what ways do the nondegree programs of teaching and learning offered by the school reflect the purpose of the institution?
- How do nondegree programs reflect the administrative care and educational quality appropriate to a graduate school of theology?
- How does the school distinguish among the types of nondegree programs it offers, and how does it ensure that students know if credit is granted for work; and if credit is granted, how does the school ensure the educational quality of this credit in terms of admissions and academic integrity?