

# **Becoming Accredited: A Guide to Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation**

**New England Commission of Higher Education**



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# INTRODUCTION

## APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP

American institutional accreditation is a system of regular oversight and ongoing self-evaluation designed to promote institutional improvement and provide an assurance of quality to the public. Over several decades, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) has developed standards, policies, and procedures to carry out a process of peer review leading to accreditation. The Commission accredits over 200 colleges and universities in the United States, primarily in the six New England states, as well as international institutions in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

Institutions seeking accreditation by the Commission must generally complete a three-step process to demonstrate that they meet the Commission's *Requirements of Affiliation* and will be able to engage in an ongoing relationship with the Commission focused on public accountability and institutional improvement.

The three steps are:

1. Eligibility
2. Candidacy
3. Initial Accreditation

Each step has specific criteria, required institutional reports, evaluation by peer review teams, associated costs, and timeframes. An institution considering the accreditation process should carefully consider the requirements for all three steps to ensure that it understands the criteria that will have to be met and the likely timeframe for completion of each step.

Most institutions will go through each of the three steps, and the process can take at least five years. However, the Commission may determine that a well-established institution is ready to apply for initial accreditation after the eligibility period or at some point during the candidacy period. For an institution to proceed on this expedited path, the approval of the Commission President is required with the understanding that it is the Commission itself which makes all accreditation decisions.

The Commission strongly believes that the process of pursuing NECHE accreditation is a capacity-building exercise for the institution. There is great value to be gained from attending Commission workshops, working closely with Commission staff, and getting feedback on draft documents. As the institution evaluates itself against the *Standards for Accreditation*, it will have a good preview of the activities involved in a system of self-regulation. Commission staff will provide advice throughout the process; there is no need to hire outside consultants. Successful completion of the three-step process depends on the Commission's ongoing evaluations.

An application for eligibility or candidacy does not constitute a formal application for initial accreditation, nor does it commit the Commission to an eventual affiliation with the applicant institution.

Questions may be directed to the President of the Commission.

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## *Requirements of Affiliation*

To be declared eligible to apply for candidacy with the New England Commission of Higher Education, an institution of higher education, whether in the United States or operating entirely outside the United States and its territories, must meet the following Requirements of Affiliation. Candidate and accredited institutions must continue to fulfill these requirements as specified in the *Standards for Accreditation*.

### **Organizational Structure and Resources**

The institution:

1. has a charter and/or other formal authority from the appropriate governmental agency or agencies authorizing it to grant all degrees it awards, has the necessary operating authority for each jurisdiction in which it conducts its activities, and is operating within its authority;
2. has formally adopted a statement of mission, which demonstrates that the fundamental purposes of the institution are educational, and which is also appropriate to a degree-granting institution, and appropriate to those needs of society it seeks to serve;
3. has sufficient organizational and operational independence to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's standards;
4. has a governing board that includes representation reflecting the public interest that oversees the institution; assures that two-thirds or more of the board members, including the chair, have no personal or immediate familial financial interest in the institution, including as employee, stockholder or shareholder, corporate director, or contractor;
5. has a chief executive officer, appointed by and responsible to the governing board, whose full-time or major responsibility is to the institution and who possesses the requisite authority;
6. has faculty sufficient in number, qualifications, and experience to support the academic programs offered, including an adequate number of faculty whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential to the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes;
7. has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience, to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purposes;
8. devotes all, or substantially all, of its gross income to the support of its educational purposes and programs;
9. documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to carry out its stated purposes;
10. has financial records that relate clearly to the institution's educational activities and has these records audited annually by an external auditor in accord with the

generally accepted auditing standards for colleges and universities as adopted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants;

11. has financial records that are prepared using accounting principles recognized in the United States (i.e., U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), or International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)) reconciled to U.S. GAAP.

### **Educational Mission, Programs, and Students**

The institution:

12. offers one or more collegiate-level education programs, consistent with its mission, that leads to degrees in recognized fields of study and that require at least one year to complete;
13. awards the bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree or, if it grants only the associate's degree, includes programs leading to degrees in liberal arts or general studies or another area of study widely available at the baccalaureate level of colleges and universities that are accredited by an agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education;
14. uses English as a principal language of instruction and operation, sufficient to permit an evaluation by the Commission; offers academic programs that are comparable in length, curriculum, objectives, learning outcomes, and degrees awarded to those offered by institutions accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education; has sufficient members of the campus community (e.g., Board; administrators; professional staff; faculty) who have experience with U.S. higher education and who are collectively prepared to ensure the comparability of the institution's programs to those offered by NECHE-accredited institutions;
15. has, for each of its educational programs that lead to a degree, clearly defined and published objectives appropriate to higher education in level, standards, and quality, as well as the means for achieving them, including a designated course of studies acceptable for meeting degree requirements, adequate guidance to degree candidates in the satisfaction of requirements, and adequate grading or evaluating procedures;
16. awards only degrees appropriate to each graduate's level of attainment;
17. in addition to study of the areas of specialization proper to its principal educational programs, requires a coherent and substantive program of liberal studies at the postsecondary level, as either a prerequisite to or a clearly defined element in those programs;
18. has adopted a statement specifying the potential students it wishes to serve, and admits qualified students to its programs under admission policies consistent with this statement and appropriate to those programs;
19. has students enrolled in and pursuing its principal educational programs at the time of the Commission's evaluation;

20. has available to students and the public a current and accurate website and catalog or comparable official publication setting forth purposes and objectives, entrance requirements and procedures, rules and regulations for student conduct, programs and courses, degree completion requirements, full-time and part-time faculty and degrees held, costs, refunds, and other items related to attending or withdrawing from the institution;
21. has graduated at least one class in its principal educational programs before the Commission's evaluation for accredited status;
22. agrees to submit any dispute involving the final denial, withdrawal, or termination of candidacy or accreditation to initial arbitration through a U.S. entity prior to any other legal action.

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## OVERVIEW

### U.S. INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

In the United States, accreditation is the primary process for assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions. Regional accreditation traces its roots to 1885. Through decades of experience and refinement, both leading and reflecting, American higher education has evolved into a model that is acknowledged as an exemplar around the globe with standards that go beyond inputs and processes – for example, Do students have access to learning resources and are they using them? – to focus increasingly on outcomes: How well are students gaining skills of finding, evaluating, and using information?

Today, the accreditation of nearly 3,000 colleges and universities is carried out through a process formerly known as “regional” and now is referred to as “institutional” accreditation: historically, there were seven commissions operating in six geographic regions of the country through non-governmental, non-profit voluntary associations. The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) made the decision to change its scope to national rather than regional in 2020 when the US Department of Education made this option available to each of the regional accreditors and between 2020 and 2023, NECHE added nine institutions to its membership from outside of the New England region.

Accreditation is a self-regulatory, non-governmental peer review process based on rigorous standards. Colleges and universities are judged based on self-evaluations analyzing how well they meet these standards, in light of the institution’s mission. Following a review by a team of peers, accrediting commissions determine the accreditation status of the institution and use a variety of means to ensure follow-up as appropriate and further evaluation in the case of substantive change on the part of the institution. The formerly regional accreditors, now all national, accredit and oversee the quality of research universities; community colleges; liberal arts colleges; state colleges; religiously affiliated institutions; special-purpose institutions in the arts, sciences, and professional fields; military academies; historically black and Hispanic-serving institutions; and tribal colleges. These accredited institutions are public and private, for-profit and not-for-profit, secular and religious, urban and rural, large and small, old and new, traditional and non-traditional. Collectively, they enroll over 18 million students in programs ranging from associate through doctoral level degrees. The quality of these colleges and universities – and the talent they have contributed to develop regional accreditation over the decades – means that these formerly regional accreditors are highly regarded around the world. In the United States, each recognized by the United States Secretary of Education.

All accreditation agencies employ staff whose role is to ensure the Standards for Accreditation and related policies are implemented according to federal and state regulations and to serve as a liaison between the commission and the institutions in its respective membership. The work of accreditation is carried out by qualified volunteer peer reviewers who serve on visiting teams and on the commissions. These volunteers include college and university presidents, academic officers, faculty, and campus experts in finance, student services, assessment, and library/technology. At least one of every seven Commissioners is a member of the public unconnected with higher education.

Over the past decade, accreditation commissions in the United States have been leaders in helping colleges and universities develop trustworthy and useful ways to understand what and how their students are learning and use the results for improvement. American higher education is known for its diversity. The Economist’s global survey of higher education praised the American system, noting, “A sophisticated economy needs a wide variety of universities pursuing a wide variety of missions [and] the more that the state’s role contracts, the more educational variety will flourish.” Our form of accreditation has provided the conditions and framework under which diversity – and quality – have flourished.

## NEW ENGLAND COMMISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is responsible for the evaluation of institutions which award the associate's, bachelor's, master's, and/or doctoral degrees. NECHE is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a reliable authority as to the quality of education for the institutions it accredits.

NECHE traces its roots to 1885 when the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) was established. Today, NEASC is the nation's oldest regional accrediting association comprising of three commissions dedicated to the accreditation of P-12 institutions: Commission on Independent Schools; Commission on Public Schools; and Commission on International Education P-12. In 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education became a separate and independent entity.

Recognizing the importance of clearly stated and understood purposes as a guide to the effective conduct of its affairs, the Commission has adopted the following statements affirming its vision and mission:

### Vision Statement

*Accreditation by NECHE is widely recognized as an effective and efficient system of peer review, assuring the quality of education, supporting innovation, and providing value to institutions and to the public.*

### Mission Statement

*The Commission exercises the dual roles of quality assurance and encouraging continuous improvement for degree-granting institutions of higher education. The Commission assures the education community and the public that accredited institutions have clearly defined objectives consistent with Standards for Accreditation established by the Commission; that they have the organization, staffing, and resources to accomplish and sustain these objectives. In addition, through its process of accreditation, the Commission promotes the improvement and effectiveness of its affiliated educational institutions.*

The New England Commission of Higher Education consists of at least 21 members elected for three-year terms at its annual meeting in December. A Commissioner may be re-elected for one additional three-year term; Commissioners serving as chair or vice-chair may have their terms extended. Membership on the Commission is drawn from a range of institutions and from the public. At least one of every seven commissioners is a member of the public who, along with immediate family members, is not an employee, contractor, or trustee of an institution of higher education. Commissioners serve without compensation and those who are institutional representatives must be currently active on the faculties or staffs of an institution accredited by the Commission. The Commission normally meets four times a year.

The day-to-day activities of the Commission are conducted by the President of the Commission, professional staff, and support staff. The President and professional staff oversee and direct the work of the Commission's evaluation program, including the self-study and on-site evaluation processes. In addition to representing the Commission to its affiliated colleges and universities, they also work closely with the various state offices of higher education and promote the work of the Commission through participation in appropriate local, state, regional, national, and international meetings.



## PEER EVALUATORS

U.S. accreditation is a system of peer review. The Commission has a database of about 2,000 evaluators – full-time faculty members and administrators at accredited institutions who are qualified by their credentials and experience to apply Commission standards.

Commission staff consult with the institution being evaluated to determine the composition of the visiting team, in light of each institution's specific situation and the Commission's requirement that all standards receive appropriate coverage. The team as a whole is chosen to represent diverse groups and talents from comparable institutions, as well as both experienced and new evaluators.

Evaluators are provided with intensive training prior to the evaluation visit. They are expected to make sound professional judgments, based on the *Standards for Accreditation*, that will help the Commission evaluate and enhance the quality of higher education among institutions affiliated with the Commission. All evaluators are responsible for excusing themselves from participating in any review that might represent or be perceived as a conflict of interest. For further information on how the institution and its self-study are evaluated by peer evaluators, consult the *Evaluation Manual*, which is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

# ELIGIBILITY

## MEANING OF ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility is a finding by the New England Commission of Higher Education that the institution meets the *Requirements of Affiliation* and may, if it chooses, apply for candidacy for accreditation within the next two years.

Eligibility is a preliminary finding. It is not candidacy or accreditation, nor does it assume that a future application will be successful. It does not indicate any affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education.

## ELIGIBILITY PROCESS

### 1. Preliminary meeting with Commission staff

If an institution believes that it meets the Commission's *Requirements of Affiliation* and wishes to explore the possibility of accreditation through the Commission, its chief executive officer should contact the Commission President to arrange a meeting and presentation of institutional materials. The meeting generally takes place at the Commission offices in Wakefield, Massachusetts.

The purpose of the preliminary meeting is twofold: to help the Commission learn about the institution and to help the institution understand the accreditation process. Following a brief presentation by the institution about its mission, the context in which it operates, the programs it offers, and its own assessment of how it meets the eligibility requirements, Commission staff will provide an overview of Commission policies and procedures, offer a preliminary review of the *Requirements of Affiliation* and *Standards for Accreditation*, and discuss next steps.

Following this initial discussion, if the institution continues to believe it currently meets the *Requirements of Affiliation*, it prepares a draft report of eligibility for review by the Commission staff. (Specific instructions on preparing the report of eligibility can be found in the Appendix to this booklet.)

### 2. Staff visit and advice to institution

If review of the draft report suggests that the institution may be eligible, a visit to the institution by the Commission President (or designee) will be scheduled. Meetings with the institution's senior leadership, governing board, faculty, and students will provide an in-depth introduction to the institution. The President will also consult with local U.S. and in-country education officials in order to further understand the context in which the institution operates. The institution may wish to use the opportunity of this visit to promote on its campus a broader understanding of accreditation processes, standards, and expectations.

Prior to the staff visit, the institution will complete an Account Information Form that will enable staff to create an account for the institution in the Commission's database and provide the institution with access to the NECHE Institution Portal. The institution will submit all of its reports through the NECHE Institution Portal. The following information is required:

- The full name of the institution and mailing address of the main campus
- The address of additional instructional locations (if any)
- The billing address of the institution
- The URL to the institution's website
- The full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) and total expenses (this information is required to calculate annual dues). Information about dues and fees can be found on the Commission [website](#)

- The name and contact information (phone, email, and mailing address if different from the main campus) for the institution's:
  - Chief Executive Officer
  - The assistant to the CEO, if applicable
  - Chief Academic Officer
  - Chief Financial Officer
  - Accreditation Liaison Officer, if one has been identified

Travel and accommodation costs for the President's visit are invoiced to the institution; in addition, the institution is invoiced for the staff visit fee at this time. The current staff visit fee can be found on the Commission website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

Following the President's visit, confidential written feedback on the draft report and the site visit will be provided to the institution. It will include advice on whether it would be appropriate for the institution to pursue eligibility at this time or whether there are conditions that must be met first. This report is provided to the institution only; it does not go to the Commission.

### **3. Report of Eligibility**

Based on the feedback from the Commission staff, the institution may prepare a revised report of eligibility. The report of eligibility addresses the institution's compliance with the *Requirements of Affiliation* and includes a letter of intent stating that the institution's governing board has authorized seeking eventual affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education.

The institution is asked to upload an electronic version (single, searchable pdf file) of the eligibility report and appendices to the NECHE Institution Portal six weeks prior to the scheduled team visit. The institution is also asked to mail the eligibility report to team members who request a paper copy. Prior to the review of the institution's report by the Commission, the contents of the report and appendices, and workroom documents will be validated by a visiting team. While the team members will have access to the institution's eligibility report through the Portal, the institution will need to provide each team member with electronic access to workroom documents related to the *Requirements of Affiliation* (see the Appendix section of this guide for examples of workroom documents).

Once Commission staff find that the eligibility report is complete and shows probable compliance with the *Requirements of Affiliation*, an eligibility visit to the institution will be scheduled.

### **4. Eligibility Visit**

The on-campus eligibility visit is undertaken by two peer evaluators and a member of Commission staff. Its purpose is to prepare a report validating the contents of the institution's report of eligibility and to make a confidential recommendation to the Commission regarding whether the institution is eligible to make a formal application for candidacy.

The institution will be asked to identify convenient dates during the academic year for the team visit, which normally begins on Sunday evening and finishes on Wednesday morning. An eligibility visit can generally be scheduled within three to four months after the Commission staff visit.

The on-campus visit includes required meetings with the governing board; open meetings with students, staff, and faculty; and individual meetings with senior leadership and department heads. The *Evaluation Manual* for use by peer evaluators is available on the Commission website and offers a useful introduction to the team visit.

The eligibility visit and the resulting team recommendation do not constitute an evaluation for candidacy, nor does a finding of eligibility result in any affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education.

## 5. Cost of the Eligibility Visit

Members of evaluation teams are volunteers and serve without honoraria. Their transportation and accommodation costs are the responsibility of the institution. In addition, an evaluation fee for the eligibility visit is charged to the institution prior to the visit. The current fee for the eligibility visit can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

## 6. Commission Decision on Eligibility

At one of its regularly scheduled meetings, the Commission will consider the report of eligibility and the team report and confidential recommendation to determine if the institution should be declared eligible to apply for candidacy. Normally, the Commission will convey the expectation that consideration for candidacy will occur within two years. Should the application for candidacy take longer than two years, the Commission reserves the right to revisit the institution's eligibility for candidacy.

The Commission decision on eligibility applies to the institution as it exists at the time of the evaluation visit. New programs, degree levels, off-campus instructional sites, and other substantive changes, as defined in Commission policy, must be reported in advance to the Commission, which may require further evaluation before the institution may apply for candidacy. The policy on Substantive Change can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

If the Commission determines that the institution is not eligible, the institution will be so notified and given the reasons for the decision. This decision is not subject to appeal. An institution denied eligibility may resubmit a report of eligibility, followed by an eligibility visit, one year following the Commission's notification.

## PUBLIC REPRESENTATION OF ELIGIBILITY

A determination of eligibility is not a formal status or affiliation with the Commission. It is a preliminary finding that the institution is potentially accreditable by the New England Commission of Higher Education, and that it may proceed with the process for candidacy within two years.

In order to ensure that there is no misunderstanding by the public, institutions must use only Commission-approved language about a finding of eligibility on their websites and in other public communications.

If the Commission issues a favorable decision following the eligibility visit, the institution may use only the following public statement in its entirety:

"The New England Commission of Higher Education has determined that [Name of institution] is eligible to proceed with an application for candidacy for accreditation within two years. A determination of eligibility is not candidacy or accreditation, nor does it indicate a likelihood of eventual accreditation. Questions about eligibility and the accreditation process should be directed to the President of the Commission."

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Use of other language will be viewed as a breach of institutional integrity. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in withdrawal of the eligibility process.

# CANDIDACY

## MEANING OF CANDIDACY

Candidacy is a pre-accreditation status of affiliation that indicates an institution has met the Commission's *Criteria for Candidacy*, is progressing toward accreditation, but does not yet meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*.

The *Standards for Accreditation* are an articulation by the higher education community of what a college or university must do in order to deserve the public trust. They also function as a framework for institutional development and self-evaluation. Covering nine areas of institutional academic and administrative operations, the Standards are largely qualitative, in keeping with their need to apply to a variety of institutions with different missions. The Standards are available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

A candidate institution has a maximum period of five years, from the effective date of candidacy, within which to achieve initial accreditation status. It is not mandatory that candidate institutions remain in candidate status for the maximum period of five years. However, early applications are appropriate only when encouraged by the results of evaluation visits and Commission action.

## CRITERIA FOR CANDIDACY

To be granted candidacy status, an overseas institution must demonstrate that it:

1. meets all the *Requirements of Affiliation*;
2. has, with the intention of meeting the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*, effectively organized sufficient human, financial, learning, and physical resources into educational and other activities so that it is accomplishing its immediate educational purposes;
3. has established and is following realistic plans to acquire, organize, and appropriately apply any additional resources needed to comply with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* within the candidacy period;
4. currently meets the Commission's standard on *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

## THE CANDIDACY PROCESS

### 1. Applying for Candidacy

An institution may apply for candidacy only after the Commission has reviewed the report of eligibility and the visiting team's report and determined that the institution is eligible to do so. Once the Commission has determined that the institution is eligible, Commission staff will work closely with the institution on the formal application for candidacy.

An application for candidacy in no way establishes any affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education. An institution's public statements about its pursuit of accreditation must be limited to Commission-approved language as provided in this booklet.

### 2. Self-Study for Candidacy

The self-study undertaken for a candidacy application serves both internal and external purposes. It encourages institutional improvement through rigorous self-analysis. It also creates a basis for the Commission's evaluation in respect to the *Requirements of Affiliation*, the *Criteria for Candidacy*, and the *Standards for Accreditation*. As indicated in the *Criteria for Candidacy*, the institution should demonstrate in the self-study how it is organizing its current resources to accomplish immediate

educational purposes and how it is planning to acquire future resources necessary to fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The self-study for candidacy is organized in nine chapters, corresponding to the nine standards. In each chapter, the institution discusses what it currently does to meet the standard. It analyzes candidly what areas need to be improved and what plans exist to accomplish that improvement. Included with the self-study narrative are data dashboards and supplementary materials. For a fuller discussion of the self-study, institutions may consult the *Self-Study Guide*, which is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

Commission staff will provide guidance as the institution undertakes the comprehensive self-study to address each of the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*. The institution should plan to attend the self-study workshop offered by the Commission each October. It is also strongly recommended that the institution seek Commission staff review of a draft of the self-study in order to ensure that the document meets Commission expectations. The draft self-study should be uploaded through the NECHE Institution Portal at which time a Commission staff member will receive an autogenerated email indicating that the draft is ready for review. Normally, staff can provide feedback within two weeks.

Once the final self-study is prepared, it will be merged into a single, searchable pdf file, and submitted to the Commission through the NECHE Institution Portal. At the same time, a paper copy of the self-study should be sent to team members who request it.

### **3. The Financial Screen and Financial Screening Response Report**

Applicant institutions that are independent institutions of higher education are required to complete the NECHE financial screen. This is an annual process required of all NECHE independent institutions whereby the Commission attempts to identify institutions with fiscal and/or enrollment issues that may adversely affect their ability to continue to comply with the Standards for Accreditation. This screening is done by analyzing a dashboard of financial indicators that measure the institution's strength in four areas: market revenue/durability; cash flow sufficiency; liquidity; and wealth. The institution's dashboard results are compared to thresholds set by the Commission. Applicant institutions that fall below the established thresholds will submit a Financial Screening Response Report (FSRR) as an appendix to the Candidacy Self-Study.

The Financial Screening Response report consists of 3 components:

1. Financial Dashboard as provided by the Commission.
2. Two most recent years of audited financial statements (Note: Comparative financial statements satisfy this requirement.)
3. Narrative discussion (3-5 pages) of the institution's Financial Dashboard: The narrative provides an opportunity for the institution to analyze the conditions that resulted in its financial indicators falling below the thresholds, including any special circumstances that may have led to the outcome. The report will include a separate section for each area (i.e., market revenue/durability; cash flow sufficiency; liquidity; and wealth) with indicators below a threshold. The narrative will also enable the institution to demonstrate to the Commission that it understands its situation and is developing realistic plans to improve its financial condition.

The Financial Screening Response report will also be made available as a workroom document for review by the visiting team, and the Commission will consider the report as part of the candidacy self-study review.



#### **4. Selection of Visiting Team**

Institutions are asked to select dates for the visit from several possibilities during the academic year (Team visits are typically from Sunday to Wednesday). Well in advance of the campus visit, Commission staff, with consideration for the nature of the institution, propose a visiting team chair to the chief executive officer of the institution. If the selection of the chair is approved by the chief executive officer, the chair is invited to serve. Team chairs are normally institutional presidents and provosts from comparable institutions with extensive experience in accreditation activities. To ensure objectivity in the evaluation process, institutions are asked to review the proposed chair and team members for any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

After the team chair has been confirmed, a visiting team is selected from the Commission's database of peer evaluators. While the Commission always reserves the right to appoint the visiting team, the views of the institution are important in ensuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of the visiting team and in preventing conflicts of interest. The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment where even the slightest potential for conflict of interest exists. As soon as all team members have accepted appointment, Commission staff inform the institution.

#### **5. Preliminary Visit by the Team Chair**

Three to six months prior to the evaluation visit, the chair of the visiting team makes a preliminary visit to the institution. This visit, typically two days in length, is designed to help the institution understand how the team will operate and to enable the chair to assess the institution's self-study progress and discuss the institution's arrangements for the visit. The chair communicates with the institution's chief executive officer to discuss the upcoming visit, the team's time of arrival, schedule, accommodations, and related matters. The team chair may ask to see a draft of the candidacy self-study. The institution is also encouraged to share a draft of the self-study with Commission staff for feedback. In consultation with Commission staff, the institution is asked to help determine the best way to orient the team chair to the educational context of the country.

#### **6. Submitting the Draft Candidacy Self-Study and the Final Candidacy Self-Study**

As noted above, the institution will upload the draft self-study through the NECHE Institution Portal; the team chair may request a paper copy. The team chair should have access to the draft self-study at least two weeks prior to the preliminary visit.

Once the institution has integrated feedback from the team chair and Commission staff into the draft candidacy self-study, the institution will upload an electronic version (single, searchable pdf file) of the final self-study and appendices to the NECHE Institution Portal six weeks prior to the scheduled team visit. The institution is also asked to mail the self-study to team members who request a paper copy. Prior to the review of the institution's self-study by the Commission, the contents of the self-study and appendices, and workroom documents will be validated by a visiting team. While the team members will have access to the institution's Self-Study through the Portal, the institution will need to provide each team member with electronic access to workroom documents (e.g., institutional strategic and institutional planning documents, by-laws and meeting minutes of governing boards and committees, enrollment and graduation data, program reviews, financial and other institutional resource documents, and assessment data (see Sample Documents for the Workroom).

#### **7. Candidacy Visit**

The candidacy visit is undertaken by a team chair and generally 5-7 peer evaluators. Its purpose is to prepare a report validating the contents of the institution's candidacy self-study and to make a confidential recommendation to the Commission regarding the extent to which the institution meets the Criteria for Candidacy and its potential for attaining initial accreditation within a maximum of five years. Candidacy visits are most effective when they are conducted in-person. The decision to permit one or more team members to join the team virtually is at the sole discretion of the Commission. Further information about the on-site evaluation can be found in the Evaluation Manual, which is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

The on-campus evaluation is typically scheduled for a three-day period, from Sunday afternoon through Wednesday afternoon. For visits to international institutions, depending on flight times, the team usually arrives on a Saturday. The team's work begins on Sunday afternoon to review team assignments and the protocol for the visit. That evening, the team meets with senior administrators, faculty, and board members over dinner. The following days of the visit are spent conducting a review of the institution and preparing the team's report and recommendations. Classroom observations are not necessary and typically are not helpful. The exact schedule of the team is arranged in advance through discussions between the team chair and institutional staff.

On the final day, the team chair first meets privately with the chief executive officer of the institution to discuss the team's findings. The chief executive officer and team chair determine who, in addition to the full visiting team, will be present to hear those findings presented at a meeting known as the "exit report." The session may be an open one for the entire institutional community or a gathering of just the senior leaders of the institution. At the exit report, the team chair provides an oral preview of major points that will be included in the team's written evaluation.

The institution should arrange for charges for the visiting team's lodging and meals to be billed directly to the institution. The visiting team members are guests on campus but they are also outside evaluators with a job to do, and objectivity is crucial to their work. Hospitality should be considerate, but it need not be lavish. *Gifts are not appropriate.*

#### **8. Team Report, Confidential Recommendation to the Commission, and Institution's Response to the Team Report**

The visiting team chair, with the assistance of the other team members, is responsible for the preparation of a written report for submission to the Commission. This report is an assessment of the extent to which the institution meets the *Criteria for Candidacy* and its potential for attaining initial accreditation within a maximum of five years. The team chair also submits to the Commission a confidential recommendation on whether the institution should be granted candidacy. This confidential recommendation is not shared with the institution. Specific reasons based on *the Requirements of Affiliation* and the *Standards for Accreditation* must be set forth in support of the committee's recommendation to grant or deny candidacy.

A team visit and the resulting confidential recommendation do not constitute an affiliation with the Commission.

Within about six weeks after the visit, an autogenerated email to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will alert the institution that the draft team report is available through the NECHE Institution Portal, and that the institution has one week to review the draft for factual accuracy. The report with edits will be uploaded to the Portal. When the team report is finalized (generally by the ninth week after the visit), once again, an autogenerated email will be sent to the CEO requesting that the institution's response to the team report be upload via the Portal within two weeks. The Commission will receive all materials related to the candidacy visit (self-study, team report, confidential recommendation, institution's response to the team report) several weeks prior to one of its regularly scheduled meetings.

#### **9. Cost of the Candidacy Visit**

Transportation and accommodation costs for the visiting team are the responsibility of the institution. In addition, an evaluation fee for the candidacy visit is charged to the institution prior to the visit. The current fee for the candidacy visit can be found on the Commission website [www.necche.org](http://www.necche.org).

#### **10. Commission Action on Candidacy Application**

At one of its regularly scheduled meetings in the semester following the evaluation visit, the Commission considers the institution's application for candidacy, reviewing all relevant information



available: the self-study, the report of the visiting team, the institutional response to the report, and the team's confidential recommendation. The institutional chief executive officer and team chair are asked to meet in person with the Commission at this meeting.

Following the meeting, the Commission notifies the institution in writing of its decision. The policy on the Range and Meaning of Commission Actions describes the possible outcomes of the Commission's deliberations and is available on the Commission website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

If candidate status is granted, the effective date (unless otherwise specified) is the last day of the evaluation visit that resulted in the Commission's action.

An institution denied candidate status is free to reapply when it can demonstrate that it has substantially improved those areas cited as reasons for the denial.

As part of its action, the Commission will specify follow-up monitoring which typically is a biennial report and focused evaluation (described below) at the midpoint to initial accreditation, and the Procedures for the Biennial Review are followed. At its discretion, the Commission may indicate that only a biennial report (no visit) will be required or that the institution, in consultation with Commission staff, may request to apply for initial accreditation instead of going through a biennial evaluation.

#### **PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON CANDIDATE STATUS**

In order to ensure that there is no misunderstanding by the public, institutions are asked to use only Commission-approved language about candidacy. An institution granted candidacy status must use only the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education on its website or in print publications. Use of other language will be viewed as a breach of institutional integrity. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in withdrawal of the candidacy process.

[Name of institution] has been granted candidate for accreditation status by the New England Commission of Higher Education.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation. Candidacy is a formal affiliation with the New England Commission of Higher Education. It indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Inquiries regarding an institution's affiliation status with the Commission should be directed to:

**The New England Commission of Higher Education**  
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210  
Wakefield, MA 01880, U.S.A.  
Direct line to Commission offices: (781) 425-7785  
E-mail: [info@neche.org](mailto:info@neche.org)  
Website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

Upon inquiry about a candidate institution, the Commission will release the date when candidacy was granted, the date of the next review, and certain other information described in the policy on Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions.

# BIENNIAL REVIEW OF CANDIDACY

## MEANING OF BIENNIAL REVIEW OF CANDIDACY

A biennial review is part of the candidacy process. Two years after candidacy has been granted, the institution submits an updated self-study reflecting developments since the time of the candidacy visit, including steps taken to respond to concerns specified in the Commission's notification letter. The report is followed by a focused evaluation visit conducted by a small team (generally 3-4) of evaluators. The purpose of this biennial review is to determine if the institution continues to meet the Criteria for Candidacy and is making reasonable progress toward meeting the Standards for Accreditation.

The biennial review does not serve as an evaluation for initial accreditation.

## THE BIENNIAL REVIEW PROCESS

The biennial review process is similar to the Candidacy Process specified above:

1. preparation of a biennial report by the candidate institution;
2. selection of a visiting team;
3. uploading the draft and final biennial report through the NECHE Institution Portal;
4. preliminary visit by the team chair;
5. on-site evaluation by the visiting team to validate the contents of the biennial report;
6. visiting team report, confidential recommendation on continuation of candidacy, and institution's response to the team report;
7. commission action to continue or withdraw candidate status.

### 1. Preparation of the Institution's Biennial Report

The biennial report is an update of the self-study submitted for the institution's candidacy application. In addition to addressing areas of emphasis specified in the Commission's notification letter, the biennial review is a phase of the institution's planning process that provides it with an opportunity to measure its progress toward meeting the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. If the institution's biennial self-assessment is effective, the self-study it will prepare for initial accreditation will be an updating of its biennial report.

Therefore, the most useful biennial report will be both a progress report and a planning document, addressing each of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation as well as its Criteria for Candidacy. Like the self-study for candidacy, the report should be a comprehensive and coherent narrative accompanied by the required supportive materials. Where progress has occurred, it should be documented. Where problems remain, they should be candidly acknowledged and plans for their solution should be detailed.

### 2. Submitting the Biennial Report

As with the candidacy self-study, the institution is encouraged to work with Commission staff on preparing the biennial report. Once the institution has integrated feedback from Commission staff into the draft biennial report, the institution will upload an electronic version (single, searchable pdf file) of the final report and appendices to the NECHE Institution Portal six weeks prior to the scheduled team visit. The institution is also asked to mail the report to team members who request a paper copy. Prior to the review of the institution's biennial report by the Commission, its contents and workroom documents will be validated by a visiting team. While the team members will have access to the institution's report through the Portal, the institution will need to provide each team member with electronic access to workroom documents that have been updated since the candidacy visit (see Sample Documents for the Workroom).

### 3. Biennial Review Visit

For the biennial review, the process for scheduling the visit and appointing the evaluation team is essentially the same as that for the candidacy application. A preliminary visit by the team chair may be considered optional but is highly recommended. Generally, three or more team members, spending two

or three days on campus, will examine materials, conduct interviews, and present an “exit report” – an oral preview of their findings. As with the candidacy application, the host institution is responsible for travel and accommodation expenses for the team, as well as for a focused evaluation fee. The current schedule of dues and fees is available on the Commission website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

#### **4. Visiting Team Report, Confidential Recommendation to the Commission, and Institution’s Response to the Team Report**

The process of preparing the team report and uploading it to via the NECHE portal is the same as prescribed for the eligibility and candidacy visits specified above. In addition to the team report, the confidential recommendation will indicate whether the institution should be continued in candidacy. The institution will also provide a written response to the team's report to the Commission.

At one of its regularly scheduled meetings in the semester following the evaluation visit, the Commission considers the institutional materials, the report of the visiting team, the institutional response to the report, and the team’s confidential recommendation. The institutional chief executive officer and team chair are asked to meet in person with the Commission at this meeting.

The Commission’s decision whether to continue candidate status is final. Should the Commission determine that candidacy should be withdrawn, it will provide the institution with an opportunity to appear before it in person and show cause why that action should not be taken. The Commission’s final decision is subject to the appeal process then in effect.

#### **5. Costs of the Biennial Visit**

As with the candidacy visit and specified above, transportation and accommodation costs for the visiting team are the responsibility of the institution. In addition, an evaluation fee for the biennial visit is charged to the institution prior to the visit. The current fee for the biennial visit can be found on the Commission website: [www.neche.or](http://www.neche.or)

### **BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CANDIDACY**

1. Candidacy is a formal status of affiliation with the Commission that can be mentioned on the institution’s website using the Commission-approved language above.
2. Candidate institutions are listed on the Commission website in the roster of affiliated institutions.
3. Candidate institutions may nominate senior members of their faculty and administration to serve on evaluation teams. Such service is selective and dependent on finding an appropriate match for the individual’s expertise.
4. Candidate institutions are invited to provide comments to the Commission on revisions to policies and other relevant matters.

Candidate institutions also have the following responsibilities:

**Annual Report.** All affiliated institutions are asked to complete and submit an online data form in the spring of each year.

**Financial Screen.** As noted above, all independent affiliated institutions are asked to complete the annual financial screen dashboard and, if requested, to submit a Financial Screening Response Report in the late fall of each year.

**Notification of Substantive Change.** Candidate status encompasses only those aspects of the institution in existence at the time of the evaluation visit. New programs, degree levels, off-

campus instructional sites, and other substantive changes, as defined in Commission policy, must be reported in advance and approved by the Commission before the institution can claim inclusion of such changes in its candidate status. The policy on Substantive Change can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

### **COSTS OF CANDIDACY**

If the institution is accepted as a candidate, it pays annual dues based on its full-time equivalent enrollment and total expenses. There are also fees associated with the biennial visit (specified above) and substantive change proposals submitted during candidacy. The current schedule of dues and fees is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

### **LOSS OF CANDIDACY**

Candidacy lapses when an institution fails to achieve accredited status by the end of the five-year period. Extensions of candidacy beyond the fifth year are granted only rarely and require action by the Commission.

Withdrawal of candidacy within the five-year period can occur, following procedures outlined in the policy on the Range and Meaning of Commission Actions, as a result of a determination that the institution no longer meets one or more of the *Criteria for Candidacy* or that conditions at the institution have been radically altered since it was admitted to candidacy. An institution removed from candidacy may reapply for candidate status when it can demonstrate that the conditions leading to the lapse or withdrawal of candidacy have been corrected. However, in no case will the Commission consider such application prior to the effective date of loss of candidacy.

## **INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

### **MEANING OF INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

Accreditation is not a one-time event but an ongoing relationship with the Commission. For the relationship to be effective as both a framework for institutional improvement and a means of assuring the public of institutional quality, institutions must commit to regular monitoring through reports and on-site visits. An open and candid dialogue with peer evaluators and the Commission is the hallmark of the U.S. accreditation system of self-regulation. The five years of candidacy provide sufficient opportunity for the institution to understand Commission expectations fully and for the Commission to develop trust that the future relationship will be a good one.

### **THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

An evaluation for initial accreditation normally occurs during the fifth year of candidate status. In special circumstances, a candidate institution may apply for an earlier review. Institutions contemplating an early application should consult the President of the Commission.

#### **1. Components of the Application and Evaluation for Initial Accreditation**

The components of the application and evaluation for initial accreditation – self-study, team visit, team report and confidential recommendation, institutional response, Commission decision – are the same as those for candidacy, but the requirements are different: all nine *Standards for Accreditation* must be met at least minimally. Commission staff provide appropriate materials and advice on preparing for the evaluation for initial accreditation. Institutions may also consult the *Self-Study Guide* and the *Evaluation Manual*. Both are available on the Commission website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

## **2, Cost of the Initial Accreditation Visit**

The costs associated with the initial accreditation visit are the same as those cited above in the Candidacy section of this report. The current fee for the initial accreditation visit can be found on the Commission website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

## **3. Commission Actions on Initial Accreditation**

Decisions about initial accreditation and the acceptance of an institution into membership are taken with the utmost seriousness. Based on its review of the materials submitted by the team and the institution as part of the initial accreditation process, the Commission may take action as detailed in its policy on the Range and Meaning of Commission Actions Affecting Institutional Status. Those actions include:

### **Grant Initial Accreditation**

The Commission decides that an institution seeking accreditation should be granted that status when it is found that the institution meets the Requirements of Affiliation and the Standards for Accreditation. The effective date of initial accreditation is established by the Commission in keeping with federal regulations.

### **Deferment of Action**

Action on an institution's application for accreditation will be deferred when the Commission judges that it has insufficient data on which to base a final decision.

### **Denial of Initial Accreditation**

An institution denied initial accreditation is free to reapply when it can demonstrate that it has substantially improved those areas cited as reasons for the denial. An applicant for initial accreditation may withdraw its request for affiliation at any time prior to action by the Commission. Denial of initial accreditation is subject to the Commission's appeal process then in effect.

## **PUBLIC STATEMENT ON INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

An institution granted initial accreditation is asked to use only the following statement in its entirety when it announces its new status on its website or in printed publications.

[Name of institution] has been granted initial accreditation status by the New England Commission of Higher Education.

Accreditation by the Commission indicates that the institution meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university has been found to have the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs. It also gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Accreditation by the Commission is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding an institution's affiliation status with the Commission should be directed to:

**The New England Commission of Higher Education**  
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210  
Wakefield, MA 01880, U.S.A.  
Direct line to Commission offices: (781) 425-7785  
E-mail: [info@neche.org](mailto:info@neche.org)  
Website: [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

Upon inquiry about an affiliated institution, the Commission will release the date when initial accreditation was granted, the date of the next review, and certain other information described in the policy on Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions. If an institution releases information that misrepresents its affiliation, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action. Should it fail to do so, the Commission will take appropriate action.

## **AFFILIATION WITH NECHE**

### **ONGOING COST OF AFFILIATION**

Accreditation is a system of peer review. In New England it is conducted largely by volunteers who serve without honoraria. Fees and annual dues paid by affiliated institutions cover the cost of services provided by the Commission and are the means by which independent, non-governmental accreditation is sustained.

All affiliated institutions pay annual dues based on their full-time equivalent enrollment and total expenses. In addition, evaluation fees are charged for every site visit by a review team. The current schedule of affiliation and evaluation fees is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

### **RESPONSIBILITIES OF NEWLY ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS**

**Annual Report.** All affiliated institutions are asked to complete and submit an online data form in the spring of each year.

**Financial Screen.** As noted above, all independent affiliated institutions are asked to complete the annual financial screen dashboard and, if requested, to submit a Financial Screening Response Report in the late fall of each year.

**Notification of Substantive Change.** Accreditation status encompasses only those aspects of the institution in existence at the time of the evaluation visit. New programs, degree levels, off-campus instructional sites, and other substantive changes, as defined in Commission policy, must be reported in advance and approved by the Commission before the institution implements the change. The policy on Substantive Change can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

**Next comprehensive evaluation.** Newly accredited institutions undergo a comprehensive evaluation after five years. Following that evaluation, the Commission will establish the date of the next comprehensive evaluation and any further monitoring it may deem appropriate.

## APPENDIX

### THE REPORT OF ELIGIBILITY: RESPONDING TO THE COMMISSION'S REQUIREMENTS OF AFFILIATION

The Requirements of Affiliation define the Commission's universe of institutions by cataloging those basic elements and characteristics considered essential in any affiliated institution. Each institution applying for candidacy must document compliance with the Requirements in its report of eligibility. If candidate status is granted, the institution is required to demonstrate continued compliance through the biennial review and in its self-study for initial accreditation.

The report of eligibility should respond specifically to each of the numbered requirements below.

The Commentary states the rationale for the requirement and identifies specific factual information that should be included in the response to the numbered item. (Each requirement should be stated in the report. It is not necessary to repeat the commentary.) When asked to indicate where information can be found in the institution's catalog, include the specific page number. When asked to indicate where information can be found on the institution's website, include the URL that links specifically to the requested information.

The report of eligibility should be concise, no longer than thirty (30) pages, and should be accompanied by relevant supporting documents in an appendix.

**Providing the report of eligibility does not constitute a formal application for candidacy, nor does it commit the Commission to an evaluation of the institution for affiliation.**

The institution:

1. *has a charter and/or other formal authority from the appropriate governmental agency or agencies authorizing it to grant all degrees it awards, has the necessary operating authority for each jurisdiction in which it conducts activities, and is operating within its authority;*

**Commentary:** By this requirement, the Commission is assured that affiliated institutions are operating legally.

✓ Indicate the source or sources of the institution's degree-granting or operating authority for all jurisdictions in which the institution provides instruction.

✓ Include a copy of the institution's charter(s) or other document(s) conferring degree-granting authority.

2. *has formally adopted a statement of mission, which demonstrates that the fundamental purposes of the institution are educational, and which is also appropriate to a degree-granting institution and appropriate to those needs of society it seeks to serve;*

**Commentary:** The term "mission" refers to a general, relatively unchanging broad purpose that the institution seeks to fulfill. Statements of institutional mission provide the basis for the Commission's evaluation process, since institutions are evaluated against their stated purposes. The Commission limits its accreditation activities to degree-granting institutions. The mission of an institution seeking to establish affiliation with the Commission must conform generally to those of institutions within the traditions of American higher education. Furthermore, because education serves the end of meeting the needs of society, the purposes of educational institutions should be directed toward that goal.



✓ State the institutional mission and indicate where the mission statement is published in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

✓ Indicate when the mission was adopted and by what body.

3. *has sufficient organizational and operational independence to be held accountable for meeting the Commission's standards;*

**Commentary:** The Commission wishes to be assured that the institution is sufficiently independent of any related entity and has the autonomy to fulfill the Standards for Accreditation.

✓ Identify any related entity (owner, parent corporation, sponsoring church or religious congregation, system) associated with the institution and describe the relationship between the related entity and the institution.

✓ Identify any functions shared between the institution and the related entity or other institutions associated with the related entity.

4. *has a governing board that includes representation reflecting the public interest that oversees the institution; assures that two-thirds or more of the board members, including the chair, have no personal or immediate familial financial interest in the institution, including as employee, stockholder or shareholder, corporate director, or contractor;*

**Commentary:** An affiliated institution must demonstrate the existence of a properly constituted entity responsible for its governance that has the requisite powers to see that purposes of the institution are fulfilled and sufficient independence to act in the best interest of the institution. The ability to act in the best interest of the institution is demonstrated, in part, by assuring that at least two-thirds of the board members, including the chair, have no personal or immediate financial interest in the institution. The requirement of representation of the public interest on governing boards recognizes that educational institutions serve a public purpose; their graduates not only should have personal gains from their education, but also should enhance the public good by being well-educated citizens and workers.

✓ Summarize the source and extent of the governing board's authority.

✓ Provide the names and affiliations of the members of the governing board, indicating the nature of any relationship individual trustees have with the institution apart from their membership on its governing board.

✓ Identify the members of the board who have a financial interest in the institution and indicate the nature of that interest.

✓ Provide a copy of the board bylaws, statement of board responsibilities, and a copy of the board conflict of interest policy.

5. *has a chief executive officer, appointed by and responsible to the governing board, whose full-time or major responsibility is to the institution and who possesses the requisite authority;*

**Commentary:** This requirement ensures that affiliated institutions have a governing and administrative structure, including a chief executive office whose primary task is to direct the affairs of the institution. Furthermore, it assures the Commission of an authoritative point of contact with the institution.

✓ Identify the bylaws or other organizational document(s) that outline the authority and responsibilities of the institution's chief executive officer.

✓ Describe the duties of the chief executive officer and identify the positions in the institution that report directly to him/her.

✓ Indicate the appointment and evaluation procedures for the institution's chief executive officer.

6. *has faculty sufficient in number, qualifications, and experience to support the academic programs offered, including an adequate number of faculty whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential to the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes;*

**Commentary:** Through this requirement, the Commission is assured that the institution has sufficient faculty, with appropriate qualifications, to deliver its academic programs and to fulfill non-teaching responsibilities of faculty.

✓ Indicate the number of full-time faculty members and the number of part-time faculty members employed by the institution. If the institution has academic departments or divisions, indicate the number of faculty employed in each department/division.

✓ Summarize the academic qualifications and experience of the faculty.

✓ Describe the non-teaching responsibilities of faculty and indicate how these are fulfilled by the faculty employed by the institution.

7. *has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience, to provide administrative services necessary to support its mission and purposes;*

**Commentary:** The Commission seeks assurance that the non-academic functions of the institution are staffed by individuals with the expertise to fulfill their responsibilities effectively for the ongoing sustainability and improvement of the institution.

✓ Provide a list of the members of the senior leadership and their titles, indicating the degrees and experience of each, as well as the number of years at the institution.

✓ Provide a list of full-time and part-time professional staff, indicating their qualifications.

✓ Provide the full-time equivalent numbers of support staff by function.

✓ Provide an organizational chart.

8. *devotes all, or substantially all, of its gross income to the support of its educational purposes and programs;*

**Commentary:** The purpose of this requirement is to guarantee that the educational purposes of affiliated institutions are paramount and are not subverted to the achievement of other goals.

✓ Provide the operating budgets for the current and next fiscal year showing revenue and expenses for all areas of operations. Indicate the percentage of the expense budget dedicated to the support of educational purposes and programs.

✓ Describe how any operating surpluses are used.

9. *documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to carry out its stated purposes;*

**Commentary:** The Commission wishes to be assured that institutions have the financial capacity to support their educational objectives and that their fiscal stability is not unduly dependent on a vulnerable or narrow base of funding support now or in the future.

✓ Describe the institution's funding base and financial resources.

✓ Identify all external funding sources, foundation grants, public subsidies, etc.

✓ Describe the institution's plans for financial development. Include fundraising and financial planning documents.

10. *has financial records that relate clearly to the institution's educational activities and has these records audited annually by an external auditor in accord with the generally accepted auditing standards for colleges and universities as adopted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants;*

**Commentary:** The students' welfare is the concern of the Commission in this requirement. When students enroll, making a substantial commitment of time and money, they should be assured that the institution has the financial means of carrying out its programs now and into the future.

✓ Provide the institution's most recent audited financial statements and management letter.

11. *has financial records that are prepared using accounting principles recognized in the United States (i.e., U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), or International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) reconciled to U.S. GAAP.*

**Commentary:** To be reviewed by the Commission, financial records for all institutions must be prepared in a consistent format.

✓ Provide the institution's most recent audited financial statements that have been prepared using accounting principles recognized in the United States (i.e., U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), or International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) reconciled to U.S. GAAP.

12. *offers one or more collegiate-level education programs, consistent with its mission, that leads to degrees in recognized fields of study and that require at least one year to complete;*

**Commentary:** The Commission deals only with degree-granting institutions. Institutions offering only short courses or certificates are excluded from its scope. (The Commission does, however, regard as appropriate the offering of short courses or certificates in a context established by the presence of degree programs.) The institution's mission gives general direction to its academic programs; programs should be consistent with the mission.

✓ Summarize the programmatic offerings of the institution, including their relationship to the mission, and the anticipated time to complete each degree.

✓ Indicate where detailed information about the institution's academic programs can be found in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

13. *awards the bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree or, if it grants only the associate's degree, includes programs leading to degrees in liberal arts or general studies or another area of study widely available*

*at the baccalaureate level of colleges and universities that are accredited by an agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education;*

**Commentary:** This requirement limits the range of degree-granting institutions that may be found eligible. Specifically, the Commission's purview is limited to institutions that provide students with the opportunity to complete academic programs that will prepare them to pursue degrees at a higher level at institutions that are accredited in the United States.

✓ Identify all degrees awarded. If only the associate's degree is granted, indicated programs in the liberal arts or general studies or in areas of study widely available at the baccalaureate level of colleges and universities that are accredited by an agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

✓ Indicate where information about liberal arts offerings can be found in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

14. *uses English as a principal language of instruction and operation, sufficient to permit an evaluation by the Commission; offers academic programs that are comparable in length, curriculum, objectives, learning outcomes, and degrees awarded to those offered by institutions accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education; has sufficient members of the campus community (e.g., Board; administrators; professional staff; faculty) who have experience with U.S. higher education and who are collectively prepared to ensure the comparability of the institution's programs to those offered by NECHE-accredited institutions;*

**Commentary:** The requirements ensure consistency among programs that are offered by NECHE-accreditation institutions. English is the primary language used by the Commission and its evaluators to confirm compliance with the *Requirements of Affiliation* and the *Standards for Accreditation*. Academic programs are developed and implemented in a manner that is consistent with best practices in U.S. higher education. Members of the campus community have experience with and understand the accreditation process to ensure appropriate oversight and the integrity of the academic enterprise.

✓ The self-study, reports, and all workroom documents and materials must be in English.

✓ Administrators, staff, and students must be able to communicate in English.

✓ Include learning outcomes and curriculum outlines for each program.

✓ Indicate where academic programs, length of program, curriculum objectives, and learning outcomes are published in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

✓ Include a list of Board member, faculty, administrators, and staff who are U.S., citizens and who have experience with U.S. higher education or who have taught at U.S. institutions. Include the name of the U.S. institution, the degree attained, and the courses taught, as applicable.

15. *has, for each of its educational programs that lead to a degree, clearly defined and published objectives appropriate to higher education in level, standards, and quality, as well as the means for achieving them, including a designated course of studies acceptable for meeting degree requirements, adequate guidance to degree candidates in the satisfaction of requirements, and adequate grading or evaluating procedures;*

**Commentary:** This requirement speaks to the need to assure the public that each program offered by the institution has a purpose, plan, and objectives; that each student is following a

purposeful course of study and receives guidance in ensuring fulfillment of the course requirements; and that the grading and evaluation systems are appropriate, fair, and consistent.

✓ Summarize the institution's policies on the development of program objectives and curricula.

✓ Indicate where program objectives and curricula are published in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

✓ Summarize advising activities and resources available for students.

✓ Summarize the institution's grading or evaluation procedures. Indicate where information on the evaluation of student work is available in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

16. *awards only degrees appropriate to each graduate's level of attainment;*

**Commentary:** The concern addressed here is the integrity of the institution's degrees. The institution should assure that credentials are awarded only to students who have fulfilled all program requirements at a satisfactory level of achievement.

✓ Indicate how the institution guarantees the integrity of its degrees, including the protection of academic freedom, the acceptance of transfer credit, and the prevention of plagiarism.

✓ Indicate any degree audit processes or other means by which the institution can demonstrate that its graduates' level of attainment is acceptable to baccalaureate institutions (in the case of associate degree graduates), graduate schools, and future employers.

17. *in addition to study of the areas of specialization proper to its principal educational programs, requires a coherent and substantive program of liberal studies at the postsecondary level, as either a prerequisite to or a clearly defined element in those programs;*

**Commentary:** This requirement ensures that a defined general education component is an essential element of an undergraduate degree program. The Commission's standard on The Academic Program further stipulates that at least 40 semester credit hours of an undergraduate program leading to a bachelor's degree (or 20 semester credit hours for an associate's degree) consist of courses in arts and the humanities, the sciences (including mathematics), and the social sciences. To ensure that the recognized purposes of general education in a degree program are fulfilled, the Commission requires that it be offered at the collegiate level and that it not be a random collection of courses but rather have coherence as a whole. Recognizing that there are degree-granting institutions which offer only professional graduate programs, the Commission has provided explicitly that this requirement can be met by making undergraduate work containing a general education component a prerequisite to admission to such graduate institutions.

✓ Briefly describe the institution's general education requirement. Include the number of courses and credit hours students are required to take as well as the fields of study encompassed in the general education component.

✓ Indicate where information regarding the general education requirement can be found in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

✓ For institutions offering undergraduate programs, indicate the number of general education courses offered and the number of faculty who teach general education courses.

Identify the library and technology resources and physical facilities (e.g., labs, studios) available to support the general education curriculum.

✓ For institutions offering only graduate programs, summarize the general education prerequisite and indicate where this information can be found in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

18. *has adopted a statement specifying the potential students it wishes to serve, and admits qualified students to its programs under admission policies consistent with this statement and appropriate to those programs;*

**Commentary:** This requirement ensures that an institution has given consideration to the characteristics of its potential student population and that the statement indicating the students it wishes to serve is compatible with the institution's mission and programs. It also obligates institutions to admit students who are capable of successfully completing its programs.

✓ Provide the institution's statement about the students it serves.

✓ Indicate when the statement was adopted and by what body.

✓ Summarize institutional admission policies and practices. Provide data on the most recently admitted class demonstrating that only qualified students are admitted.

✓ Indicate where a description of the current student body can be found in the institution's catalog and website (specific page number and URL).

19. *has students enrolled in and pursuing its principal educational programs at the time of the Commission's evaluation;*

**Commentary:** The Commission considers for eligibility only institutions that are currently in full operation.

✓ List current degree programs with the number of students enrolled in each.

20. *has available to students and the public a current and accurate website and catalog or comparable official publication setting forth purposes and objectives, entrance requirements and procedures, rules and regulations for student conduct, programs and courses, degree completion requirements, full-time and part-time faculty and degrees held, costs, refunds, and other items related to attending or withdrawing from the institution;*

**Commentary:** The Commission believes that each institution must operate openly, providing to its prospective and enrolled students all necessary information about its programs, activities, and procedures.

✓ Include a chart that indicates where on the institution's website each piece of the required information can be found.

✓ Include a chart that indicates where in the institution's catalog or other official publications each piece of the required information can be found; include a copy of the catalog.

✓ Describe briefly the institution's procedures to ensure the currency and accuracy of its website, catalog, and other official publications.

21. *has graduated at least one class in its principal educational programs before the Commission's evaluation for accredited status.*

**Commentary:** Since accreditation covers the entire institution, up to and including the awarding of degrees, the Commission must be able to evaluate a complete cycle of the institution's principal program as it actually operates. The provision that accreditation be retroactive to the date of graduation of the first class (if not more than one year before the Commission's evaluation) is designed to eliminate the difficulties that graduates of that first class might have with professional licensure and admission to certain graduate programs if their degrees were from an unaccredited institution.

✓ Provide the date of the first graduating class.

✓ Provide the numbers of graduating students by program over the past five years.

22. *agrees to submit any dispute involving the final denial, withdrawal, or termination of candidacy or accreditation to initial arbitration through a U.S. entity prior to any other legal action.*

**Commentary:** This requirement comes directly from federal regulations. A statement indicating the institution's agreement to submit any dispute to initial arbitration should be included in the eligibility report.

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