

## Proposed Changes to Standards 1–9 and Procedures for Accreditation

In 2008 the Board of Commissioners voted to undertake a four-year project to review and revise, as appropriate, the Commission's procedures and standards of accrediting. The work of the first two years has focused on the Procedures for Accreditation and General Institutional Standards 1 through 9. The work for the second two years, 2010–2012, will begin on the third day at this Biennial Meeting and focus on the degree program standards and the standard on extension and distance learning, Standard 10.

### Goals of revisions

The primary assumption with which the task force began its work on the General Institutional Standards (1–9) was that, for the most part, these standards have been functioning effectively. Across the past decade, the Commission has asked self-study directors, deans, visiting committee chairs and members to evaluate these standards, and those evaluations have been consistently positive. The task force thus approached its work with the intent of proposing changes that would enhance editorial clarity, update the standards as appropriate, and introduce substantive changes only where they were deemed most necessary. Some of the proposed changes have their origins in the work of several ATS projects across the past decade, most especially the work of the Technology and Theological Education Task Force.

The proposed changes to the Procedures for Accreditation reflect two primary goals. The first was to ease the number of accrediting interactions between schools and the Board of Commissioners. For example, the proposed procedures eliminate the distinction between preliminary and ongoing approval of new degree programs, which would replace two institutional petitions and board actions with one petition and board action. The second goal was to update the procedures to current U.S. Department of Education (DOE) requirements for recognized agencies.

### Process

The board appointed a Task Force on Revision of the Standards and Procedures in 2008, which has worked throughout the biennium and made its recommendation to the Board of Commissioners for consideration in its February 2010 meeting. The board received the recommendations of the task force and in a few cases modified them, then published them online for comment from member schools in March. In late April, the board considered each comment or proposal received regarding the changes to the standards or procedures. It incorporated many of them and determined that others were not necessary or advisable in the context of the standards overall. It also considered the extensive set of new DOE regulatory requirements that were issued in draft form just as the board was nearing completion of its initial recommendations in February, and several changes in the final proposed procedures will make the Commission more fully compliant with the final form of the regulations, to be issued in summer 2010. These changes were not present in the draft posted in March because the board did not have time to formulate changes prior to that posting. The most substantial newly proposed change in the procedures is related to the appeals process. The new DOE regulations require a recognized agency to have an Appeals Panel that can make final decisions related to adverse accrediting decisions, which the Commission on Accrediting defines as the failure to grant initial accreditation or to withdraw accreditation. The proposed change identifies actions that can be appealed, continues the current appeal procedures for actions other than adverse accrediting actions, and introduces a new procedure for appeals related to adverse accrediting decisions that complies with the new regulation.

The text for both the standards and the procedures indicates text proposed for deletion in ~~strikeout~~ and text proposed for addition in underline.

1 **Proposed Changes to the Current Commission on Accrediting Procedures**

2 **I. Membership**

3 A. Membership in the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological  
4 Schools (the Commission) is limited to schools that meet the Membership Eligibility  
5 Criteria of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada  
6 (ATS) and that are either Full Members of ATS or Associate Members of ATS on whom  
7 the Board of Commissioners has conferred candidate for accredited status. In addition, a  
8 school that has ceased to be a Member of ATS solely as a result of a Termination for  
9 Cause may continue as a Member of the Commission.

10 B. Each school shall either be accredited by the Commission on Accrediting or hold  
11 candidate for accredited status.

12 **II. Candidate for Accredited Status**

13 A. Candidate for accredited status is conferred on those Members of ATS that, after review  
14 on the basis of the Commission's standards and procedures, have been formally  
15 authorized by vote of the Board of Commissioners to begin the self-study process.  
16 Candidacy for accredited status is granted for a period of two years. By special action of  
17 the Board of Commissioners, candidacy may be extended for one year at a time, but in no  
18 case may candidacy extend beyond a total of five years. The Board of Commissioners  
19 recognizes candidacy for accredited status as its official pre-accredited status.

20 B. Criteria for candidate for accredited status

21 1. The applying institution shall be able to demonstrate that either it is, or by the  
22 conclusion of the self-study process will be, operating according to the Commission's  
23 General Institutional and individual Degree Program Standards and that it has the  
24 institutional capacity to evaluate its institutional and educational effectiveness.

25 2. The applying institution shall demonstrate that it has the resources and capacity to  
26 complete a self-study process and report satisfactorily within the normal two-year  
27 period.

28 C. Attaining candidate for accredited status by Associate Members of ATS

29 1. The chief administrative officer of an Associate Member school desiring candidacy  
30 status should notify the Commission staff in writing that the school intends to petition  
31 the Board of Commissioners for candidate for accredited status.

- 32 2. The applicant school shall undertake an internal study of its readiness for candidate  
 33 for accredited status. The Board of Commissioners will provide guidance for this  
 34 internal study.
- 35 3. Upon the school’s completion of its internal study, a Commission staff member will  
 36 review the study, conduct a staff visit to the school, and prepare a report regarding the  
 37 school’s compliance with the General Institutional and Degree Program Standards.
- 38 4. The Board of Commissioners will base its decision regarding candidacy on the  
 39 institution’s internal study report, on the report of the staff visit, and on its assessment  
 40 of the extent to which the institution will be able to meet the Commission’s  
 41 accrediting standards by the conclusion of the candidacy period. The Board of  
 42 Commissioners may:
- 43 a. grant candidacy for a period of two years; or  
 44 b. deny the candidacy petition.

45 If it denies the request for candidacy, the Board of Commissioners shall provide  
 46 reasons for its action and notify the school of additional responses required to  
 47 qualify for candidacy.

48 D. Maintaining candidate for accredited status

- 49 1. The institution shall demonstrate evidence of progress in the self-study process.  
 50 2. The institution shall continue to meet criteria for candidacy and conduct its degree  
 51 programs in conformity with the Commission’s Degree Program Standards.  
 52 3. The institution shall complete the Commission’s Annual Report Forms.  
 53 4. The institution shall pay annual dues as prescribed by ATS and the Commission.

54 E. Withdrawal from candidacy

55 A school may, on its own initiative, withdraw as a Member of the Commission as a  
 56 candidate for accredited status at any time during its term of candidacy, by written notice  
 57 to the Board of Commissioners.

58 **III. Accredited Membership**

- 59 A. Accredited Members are institutions in the United States and Canada that are Associate  
 60 Members of ATS that, after review on the basis of the accrediting standards of the

61 Commission, are granted accreditation by the Board of Commissioners and become Full  
62 Members of ATS.

63 B. Criteria for accredited membership

- 64 1. Accredited institutions shall demonstrate that they operate according to the  
65 Commission’s General Institutional standards.
- 66 2. All graduate degree programs offered by accredited Members of the Commission  
67 shall meet the Degree Program Standards and be approved by the Board of  
68 Commissioners.
- 69 3. All extension education offerings that provide graduate credit toward approved  
70 degrees shall be approved by the Board of Commissioners.

71 C. Attaining accredited membership

- 72 1. Candidates for accredited status shall engage in the self-study process, following the  
73 guidance provided in the Commission’s *Handbook of Accreditation*. On-site staff  
74 consultation is available to schools in the self-study process. The General Institutional  
75 and appropriate Degree Program Standards must be addressed in the self-study report.
- 76 2. The Board of Commissioners will examine the self-study report and determine  
77 whether it provides a sufficient basis for an on-site evaluation committee visit. If the  
78 Board of Commissioners approves the self-study report and authorizes an initial  
79 accreditation visit, an evaluation committee will be appointed. If the Board of  
80 Commissioners finds the self-study report inadequate, an evaluation committee visit  
81 will not be authorized, but staff will be instructed to work with the institution to make  
82 the changes necessary to permit future consideration.
- 83 3. The evaluation committee will conduct a two-to-three day visit to the campus and  
84 prepare a written report evaluating the institution in the light of the Commission’s  
85 standards, following the procedures for evaluation committees published in the  
86 Commission’s *Handbook of Accreditation*.
- 87 4. Based on the committee report and its recommendations, the Board of Commissioners  
88 may act in one of two ways:
- 89 a. Accredite the institution and approve its degree programs for a period of no longer  
90 than seven years; or ~~or up to five years; or~~
- 91 b. Deny accreditation to the institution. In this event, specific reasons will be stated  
92 in writing to the school.

93 5. It is possible for schools that offer graduate, professional theological degrees and that  
 94 are demonstrably engaged in educating professional leadership for communities of  
 95 the Christian and Jewish faiths but that are not individually eligible for accredited  
 96 membership to qualify for accreditation by virtue of resources available through  
 97 membership in a cluster or by contractual arrangement with another accredited  
 98 institution. Accreditation requires assessment of the strength of the individual  
 99 institution, the availability and actual use of resources claimed, and adequacy of the  
 100 cluster of which the school is a part. Listings in publications, both of the Commission  
 101 and of the school, shall state explicitly that such an institution is “accredited by The  
 102 Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools by virtue of  
 103 affiliation with \_\_\_\_.”

104 D. Maintaining accredited membership

- 105 1. The institution shall maintain standards defined by the Commission and abide by the  
 106 procedures of ATS and the Commission.
- 107 2. The institution shall complete the Commission’s Annual Report Forms.
- 108 3. The institution shall pay annual dues as prescribed by ATS and the Commission.
- 109 4. The institution shall, at intervals specified by the Board of Commissioners, complete  
 110 a process of comprehensive institutional self-study and prepare for regular scheduled  
 111 visits of evaluation committees.

112 E. Policy regarding teach-out plans

- 113 1. A member school must submit a teach-out plan to the Board of Commissioners for  
 114 the board’s approval upon the occurrence of any of the following events:
- 115 a. if the U.S. Department of Education notifies the Board of Commissioners of an  
 116 action against the institution to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution’s  
 117 participation in any Title IV program or initiates an emergency action against the  
 118 institution;
- 119 b. if the Board of Commissioners withdraws, terminates, or suspends the  
 120 accreditation of the institution; or
- 121 c. if the institution notifies the Board of Commissioners that it intends to cease  
 122 operations or terminate a degree program.

123

124 | **IV. Withdrawal from Membership**

125 | A school may, on its own initiative and by written notice to the Board of Commissioners,  
126 | withdraw from membership and accredited status.

127 | **IV. Procedures for Approval of New Degree Programs**

128 | A. New degree programs shall not be announced without prior approval by the Board of  
129 | Commissioners.

130 | B. A school considering the introduction of a new degree program shall notify Commission  
131 | staff and seek consultative guidance. It shall then submit a petition for consideration by  
132 | the Board of Commissioners. The petition shall follow the guidelines established by the  
133 | Board of Commissioners, including (1) an evaluation of the appropriateness of the  
134 | proposed degree in the light of the institution’s mission and purpose; (2) a detailed  
135 | description of the design of the proposed degree (program features, compliance with the  
136 | standards, resources available, relation to other degrees, etc.); (3) the institution’s  
137 | assessment of the new degree’s impact on the programs already offered; and (4) an  
138 | analysis of the financial support for the new degree and its impact on the institutional  
139 | budget.

140 | C. If the proposed degree program is at the master’s level, ~~preliminary~~-approval by the  
141 | Board of Commissioners may be granted on the basis of the written petition. If the  
142 | proposed degree is at the doctoral level, ~~preliminary~~-approval will be considered only  
143 | after a focused evaluation visit has been conducted. The board may excuse a school from  
144 | this requirement if the institution already offers an approved doctoral program in the  
145 | same degree category.

146 | ~~D. Initial approval of a degree program is designated as “preliminary approval.” This~~  
147 | ~~designation is recognized by the Commission as a formally approved status.~~

148 | ~~E. After a degree program has been offered for a sufficient period of time to permit~~  
149 | ~~extended evaluation, usually requiring the completion of all degree requirements by at~~  
150 | ~~least one group of students, the institution shall seek “ongoing approval” for the program~~  
151 | ~~by petitioning the Board of Commissioners and supplying appropriate documentation of~~  
152 | ~~its comprehensive evaluation of the program.~~

153 | **VI. Procedures for Approval of Programs Involving Multiple Locations (Extension**  
154 | **Sites) and Distance Education**

155 | A. Institutions shall seek appropriate Board of Commissioners’ action for all programs  
156 | involving multiple locations (extension sites) and distance education. The procedures for

157 review and approval of such programs vary with the type of program. The Board of  
 158 Commissioners has developed guidelines that outline in detail the review and approval  
 159 process for different types of extension sites and for distance education programs.

160 B. Branch campuses. A branch campus is geographically apart and independent of the main  
 161 campus of the institution as evidenced by permanence in nature; offering courses in  
 162 educational programs leading to degrees; having its own faculty and administrative or  
 163 supervisory organization; and having its own budgetary and hiring authority. The  
 164 establishment of a branch campus requires consultation, a written petition to the Board of  
 165 Commissioners identifying the educational programs to be offered, the financial,  
 166 operational, management, and physical resources necessary to meet Commission  
 167 standards. A site visit is required prior to final action on the institution's petition by the  
 168 Board of Commissioners.  
 169

170 BC. Complete degree sites. The offering of a full degree program at a site away from the  
 171 institution's primary location requires consultation, a written petition to the Board of  
 172 Commissioners, and a site visit prior to final action on the institution's petition by the  
 173 Board of Commissioners.  
 174

175 CD. Ongoing course offering sites. The establishment of a program at a site away from the  
 176 institution's primary location where a school intends to offer a variety of courses over  
 177 time requires the submission of a written petition to the Board of Commissioners and  
 178 action on the petition prior to the first offering of courses. Sites where courses are offered  
 179 on an ongoing basis may be visited and evaluated as part of the Board of Commissioners'  
 180 review cycle. If as much as half of the course work required for any approved degree may  
 181 be completed at the site away from the school's primary location, a site visit shall be  
 182 conducted. Pursuant to board policy, a school may be excused from an initial site visit.

183 DE. Occasional course offering sites. The establishment of a program in which a school  
 184 intends to offer courses at a site away from the institution's primary location less  
 185 frequently than on an annual basis does not require notification of or approval by the  
 186 Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners requests that institutions report  
 187 such occasional offerings on the Commission's Annual Report Form.

188 EF. International sites

189 1. *Outside Canada and the United States.* Institutions seeking to implement programs  
 190 outside Canada and the United States that involve either the ongoing offering of  
 191 courses or a full degree program must have the prior approval of the Board of  
 192 Commissioners. In its proposal, the school shall clearly give attention to the  
 193 guidelines adopted by the Board of Commissioners. After its review of the written  
 194 proposal, the Board of Commissioners will ordinarily require a site review before it

195 considers granting approval for these types of programs. The offering of occasional  
196 courses does not require notification of or approval by the Board of Commissioners.  
197 The Board of Commissioners ~~expects requests~~ that institutions report such occasional  
198 offerings on the Commission’s Annual Report Form.

199 2. *Across the Canadian/U.S. Border.* Institutions seeking to offer a program across the  
200 Canadian/United States border that involves either the ongoing offering of courses or  
201 a full degree program must have the prior approval of the Board of Commissioners.  
202 In its proposal, the school shall clearly demonstrate that it has given appropriate  
203 attention to the guidelines adopted by the Board of Commissioners and that it has  
204 consulted with Commission member schools near the location where the program is  
205 to be offered. The offering of occasional courses does not require notification of or  
206 approval by the Board of Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners requests that  
207 institutions report such occasional offerings on the Commission’s Annual Report  
208 Form.

209 FG.Distance education

210 ~~1. Distance education courses may be taught for one year with notification to the Board~~  
211 ~~of Commissioners on the Commission’s annual report form. When a course is offered~~  
212 ~~a second time, Board of Commissioners approval will be required, based on the~~  
213 ~~design, requirements, and evaluation of the proposed course.~~

214 ~~2. When an institution has received approval for two distance education courses, it may~~  
215 ~~offer additional courses by notifying the Board of Commissioners on the~~  
216 ~~Commission’s annual report form.~~

217 ~~13. When as many as six of the courses offered in any approved degree may be taken~~  
218 ~~through distance education, it will be considered a comprehensive distance education~~  
219 ~~program, and the institution must petition the Board of Commissioners for~~  
220 ~~preliminary approval, according to guidelines adopted by the Board of~~  
221 ~~Commissioners. The petition should provide a proposed time frame including the~~  
222 ~~point at which the first students taking courses in the distance education program will~~  
223 ~~have graduated.~~

224 ~~24. When the first students have graduated, †The school shall undertake a comprehensive~~  
225 ~~evaluation review of the program either as part of its institutional self-study or at~~  
226 ~~another time by request of the Board of Commissioners. and shall petition the Board~~  
227 ~~of Commissioners for ongoing approval of the program.~~

228 ~~35. When the A significant change in the design or amount of distance education courses~~  
229 ~~offered in an approved distance program is significantly altered, the school is~~

230 | responsible for reporting the change to the ~~requires further approval by the Board of~~  
231 | Commissioners.

232 | 4. In its consideration of approval of distance learning programs, ~~addition to the petition~~  
233 | (and supporting documentation), the Board of Commissioners may require a site visit.

234 | 5. Schools conducting distance education must have a process by which the institution  
235 | establishes that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is  
236 | the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the  
237 | academic credit courses by use of secure login and pass code, proctored  
238 | examinations, or other means that are effective in verifying student identity and  
239 | protecting student privacy.

240 | **VII. Enforcement of Standards for Accredited Members**

241 | A. Through comprehensive evaluation visits

242 | 1. Comprehensive Periodic ~~reevaluations~~ occur in the six months before the expiration  
243 | of a grant of accreditation. The grant of initial accreditation is limited to no more than  
244 | seven five-years and reaffirmation to no more than ten years. The Board of  
245 | Commissioners may grant accreditation for shorter periods of time, with reasons  
246 | given for the action in each case. Because accreditation is an ongoing relationship  
247 | between the Board of Commissioners and the school, the Board of Commissioners  
248 | may authorize a visit prior to the scheduled visit for reaffirmation.

249 | 2. Institutions shall engage in an ~~comprehensive~~ institutional self-study in preparation  
250 | for each comprehensive periodic visit. ~~Self-study entails both an internal institutional~~  
251 | ~~process and a written report of the findings.~~ The self-study shall follow the guidance  
252 | provided in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. In some cases, as described in the  
253 | *Handbook*, the Board of Commissioners may approve a special design for a self-study  
254 | that allows an institution to focus on identified areas of need.

255 | 3. The self-study report shall be submitted, at least sixty days before the scheduled visit,  
256 | to the Commission staff who, in consultation with the chairperson of the evaluation  
257 | committee, ~~will have responsibility to~~ determine whether the document is an adequate  
258 | basis for conducting the visit or whether the visit should be postponed. If the visit is  
259 | postponed by Commission staff for more than one semester, the institution shall have  
260 | the right of appeal at the next scheduled meeting of the Board of Commissioners.

261 | 4. In preparation for an evaluation visit, a school shall advertise to its constituencies that  
262 | it is receiving an evaluation committee and invite comment in writing concerning the  
263 | institution’s qualifications for accreditation. These comments will be available to the

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264 evaluation committee. The evaluation committee may also include an open hearing  
265 scheduled during the course of the visit.

266 4.5. The Board of Commissioners will publish the names of schools receiving a  
267 comprehensive evaluation visit in a given year and request comment from other  
268 Commission member institutions.

269 B. Through focused evaluation visits

270 1. Focused evaluation visits may be authorized by the Board of Commissioners as a  
271 response to any of the following:

- 272 a. a school’s invitation to the Board of Commissioners;
- 273 | b. a school’s decision to offer a new degree program, as noted in section IV of these  
274 | procedures;
- 275 | c. a school’s decision to offer ~~more than~~ 50 percent or more of the courses for an  
276 | approved degree at a new location;
- 277 | d. a change in ownership or substantive change in the pattern of control of the  
278 | institution;
- 279 | e. the receipt of other information that leads the Board of Commissioners to  
280 | conclude that a focused evaluation visit is advisable; ~~or~~
- 281 | f. ~~an ny other~~ indication that the quality of a school’s programs may have been  
282 | adversely affected by changes in circumstances; or
- 283 | g. in the context of investigating or the receipt of a formal complaint against the  
284 | institution when deemed appropriate.

285 2. In preparation for focused evaluation visits, the Board of Commissioners may require  
286 reports from the school as are appropriate to the situation, authorize staff or other  
287 evaluators as appropriate, and provide instruction for the school and the evaluators  
288 regarding the committee’s report to the Board of Commissioners. The expectations  
289 for a focused evaluation will be described to the school in the context of a written  
290 prospectus prepared for the visit.

291 C. ~~Through the identification of areas of needed improvement~~ Through monitoring of  
292 substantive changes  
293 ~~Institutional self-study reports and the reports of evaluation committees shall identify~~  
294 ~~areas of needed improvement. In its actions based on these reports, the Board of~~  
295 ~~Commissioners may identify areas in the school’s institutional or educational efforts that~~

296 should be the focus of improvement. When such areas have been identified, subsequent  
 297 accreditation reviews will assess the improvement the institution has made. The Board of  
 298 Commissioners' actions identifying areas of needed improvement shall be clearly related  
 299 to the standards of accreditation

300 1. Substantive changes include the following: change in ownership, name, or governing  
 301 control of an institution; change in location(s) at which an institution conducts its  
 302 educational programs; introduction of a program of six or more distance learning  
 303 courses; or the offering of a new degree or major changes in the total hours required  
 304 for an approved degree. Substantive changes do not include exceptions that an  
 305 institution may choose to make for an individual student.

306 2. It is the responsibility of an accredited school to petition the Board of Commissioners  
 307 for approval of these changes prior to implementing them.

308 D. Through the use of reports

309 1. When the Board of Commissioners may require determines that it a report if it  
 310 judges requires additional information or that an accredited institution should supply  
 311 additional information or needs to improve in has an area or areas of needed  
 312 improvement with respect to one or more general institutional or degree program  
 313 standards, it may require that the institution provide the necessary information or  
 314 effect the necessary improvement and report the results of its actions to the Board of  
 315 Commissioners. In its action to require such a report or reports, the board of  
 316 Commissioners will identify the standards where it needs information or judges that  
 317 the institution requires improvement, and it will set the submission date or dates  
 318 according to its judgment of the time reasonably necessary to provide the information  
 319 or to make the improvement.

320 2. Required reports are not a public characterization of membership status. This  
 321 requirement is not published in the *Membership List* as part of the institution's  
 322 formally accredited status.

323 2.3 The circumstances meriting reports are not instances of noncompliance, and  
 324 insufficient improvement does not signal noncompliance.

325 E. Through the use of published notations

326 1. On the basis of reports received either from an evaluation committee or from a  
 327 member institution, the Board of Commissioners shall impose a notation or notations  
 328 when it judges that an institution insufficiently meets one or more sections of an  
 329 accrediting standard. in the general institutional or degree program standards.

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- 330 2. A notation is a public characterization of membership status. The *Membership List*  
331 includes any notations imposed by the Board of Commissioners as part of the  
332 institution's formal accredited status.
- 333 ~~4.3.~~ Within two years following the imposition of a notation, the institution shall provide  
334 evidence to the Board of Commissioners as to why the notation should be lifted. If the  
335 institution does not provide the requisite evidence, the Board of Commissioners shall  
336 take an adverse action. In certain cases and for demonstrated good cause, the Board of  
337 Commissioners may extend by one year the period of imposition of a notation. In no  
338 case shall extensions for good cause exceed two years.
- 339 F. Through the use of probation
- 340 1. Probation is designed to respond to the circumstance in which an institution does not  
341 meet one or more of the General Institutional or Degree Program Standards.
- 342 2. No institution will be placed on probation without an on-site visit. The evaluation  
343 committee will prepare a written report and submit it to the institution for its  
344 response. The evaluation committee's report and the institution's response will be  
345 considered by the Board of Commissioners and will serve as the basis for the decision  
346 of the Board of Commissioners.
- 347 3. In any action imposing probation, the Board of Commissioners will identify the  
348 standards that it judges that the institution is no longer meeting and describe its  
349 expectations regarding changes necessary to correct the situation.
- 350 4. The time assigned to an institution for the remedial action required for the removal of  
351 probation will be not less than twelve nor more than twenty-four months. If an  
352 institution demonstrates that the conditions to remove probation have been met prior  
353 to the deadline, the institution may petition the Board of Commissioners for an early  
354 decision on the request to remove probation.
- 355 5. Prior to the end of the period of probation, a visit by an evaluation committee will be  
356 conducted to bring a report to the Board of Commissioners with a recommendation as  
357 to whether the Board of Commissioners should remove probation or take an adverse  
358 action. In certain cases and for demonstrated good cause, the Board of  
359 Commissioners may extend by one year the period an institution has to demonstrate  
360 that the conditions to remove probation have been met. In no case shall extensions  
361 for good cause exceed two years.
- 362 6. When probation is imposed upon an institution, the action of the Board of  
363 Commissioners will be communicated in the *Membership List* ~~ATS Bulletin~~ and in  
364 the Board of Commissioners' reports ~~according to the time frame~~ provided by the

365 board’s policies. The institution will continue to appear in the list of accredited  
 366 institutions, but following its name will appear the note, “Probation (date) to (date).”

367 G. Through withdrawal of accreditation

- 368 1. Notations and probation are not sequential actions.
- 369 2. If, at the end of the term of a notation and any extension for good cause, an institution  
 370 does not demonstrate that it has remedied the problem identified by the notation, the  
 371 board shall withdraw accreditation.
- 372 3. If, after a period of probation (including any extension for good cause), an on-site  
 373 visit, examination of the evaluation committee’s report, and receipt of an institution’s  
 374 response, the Board of Commissioners determines that an institution has failed to  
 375 demonstrate that it can or will function according to the standards of accreditation, the  
 376 Board of Commissioners shall withdraw institutional accreditation.
- 377 4. Once accreditation is withdrawn, an institution may not apply for reaccreditation for a  
 378 period of three years. Application will follow the procedures outlined in section III  
 379 above.

380 H. Adverse accrediting actions

381 Adverse accrediting actions by the Board of Commissioners are defined as denial of  
 382 accreditation or withdrawal of accreditation.

383 **VIII. The Board of Commissioners**

384 A. Composition and duties

- 385 1. The composition and duties of the Board of Commissioners ~~are~~ defined by the  
 386 Bylaws of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools.
- 387 ~~2. In the context of its duties to make decisions regarding accreditation, the Board of~~  
 388 ~~Commissioners is responsible for adopting and overseeing policies and procedures~~  
 389 ~~that ensure thorough and fair evaluation of schools and for consistently applying the~~  
 390 ~~Commission’s procedures and accrediting standards.~~
- 391 ~~23. The primary duties of the Board of Commissioners include ~~three primary duties:~~~~  
 392 ~~(1) the oversight of the corporate work of the Commission, as authorized by the~~  
 393 ~~bylaws; (2) the compilation and maintenance of the list of schools accredited in~~  
 394 ~~accordance with the standards determined by the Commission, including the authority~~  
 395 ~~to add schools to or delete them from schools to the list; (3) the undertaking, on an~~  
 396 ~~ongoing basis, of a review of accredited schools for continued inclusion on the list of~~

397 accredited schools, including all aspects of Commission accreditation pursuant to the  
398 procedures and standards of the Commission; and ~~(3), through its staff, the review~~  
399 ~~and recommendation of schools applying for membership in ATS.~~

400 ~~4. The Board of Commissioners is also responsible for (4) the regular and continuous~~  
401 ~~review of the accrediting standards and for bringing recommendations for changes to~~  
402 ~~the Commission member schools.~~

403 3. In the context of its duties to make decisions regarding accreditation, the Board of  
404 Commissioners is responsible for adopting and overseeing policies and procedures  
405 that ensure thorough and fair evaluation of schools and for consistently applying the  
406 Commission’s procedures and accrediting standards.

407 B. Procedures

408 1. Members of the Board of Commissioners must absent themselves from discussion  
409 and voting on matters having to do with schools in which they are currently or have  
410 been previously employed and schools that they have attended as students.

411 2. In making decisions following evaluation committee visits, the Board of  
412 Commissioners will consider the self-study of the school under consideration, the  
413 written report of the evaluation committee, the committee’s recommendations  
414 contained in that report, and the responses of the institution to both the report and the  
415 recommendations. The actions that the Board of Commissioners takes will be based  
416 on these materials and will reflect both the Board of Commissioners’ experience of  
417 applying the Commission’s standards and the decisions it has made regarding other  
418 institutions.

419 3. Subcommittees of the Board of Commissioners will give preliminary consideration to  
420 evaluation committee reports and recommendations. Members of the Board of  
421 Commissioners may not serve on a subcommittee considering a report from an  
422 evaluation committee ~~of which they were a member~~ on which they served, nor may  
423 they vote on decisions about schools they visited.

424 4. Any school about which the Board of Commissioners is considering an accreditation  
425 action has the right to request an appearance by its designated representative(s) before  
426 the Board of Commissioners or a subcommittee of the Board of Commissioners.

427 5. Letters reporting the actions of the Board of Commissioners will be sent to schools no  
428 later than thirty days from the date of the action.

- 429 6. When an institution plans to close, or if the Board of Commissioners determines that  
 430 an institution is in danger of closing, the institution shall be required to provide a plan  
 431 detailing agreements with other institutions and the means of support necessary to  
 432 allow students to complete the degree programs to which they were admitted in a  
 433 manner and at a cost consistent with their enrollment in the institution that is closing.
- 434 7. Accreditation is a continuing relationship between an institution and the Commission,  
 435 which is subject to review and consideration.

436 **VIIIX. Evaluation Committees**

- 437 A. Committees evaluating institutions for initial accreditation, for reaffirmation of  
 438 accreditation, and for focused visits will be selected according to procedures adopted by  
 439 the Board of Commissioners and published in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.
- 440 B. The Board of Commissioners and its staff will receive nominations for potential visitors  
 441 from the executive officers of any institution that is a Member of the Commission.
- 442 C. The Board of Commissioners will provide the resources, training, and staff support to  
 443 ensure informed and responsible work by members of evaluation committees.
- 444 D. Evaluation committee members will be selected by Commission staff, under the  
 445 supervision of the Board of Commissioners and in consultation with the institution to be  
 446 visited, and with due consideration of the purpose, programs, and context of the  
 447 institution. At least one member of the committee will not be a member of the Board of  
 448 Commissioners or ATS Board of Directors. Schools may object to the appointment of  
 449 persons to a committee if the appointee has attended the school as a student or been  
 450 employed by the institution. The number of persons appointed to evaluation committees  
 451 will vary according to the nature of the visit and will be determined in consultation with  
 452 the institution.
- 453 E. In cooperative visits with another accrediting agency, the composition of the committee  
 454 will be negotiated with that agency to ensure that all committee members are mutually  
 455 acceptable.
- 456 F. Comprehensive evaluation visits normally require the equivalent of three days on-site at  
 457 the institution, but that time may be adjusted in view of the size of the school and its  
 458 overall situation. Committees conducting focused visits normally spend the equivalent of  
 459 one or two days on-site at the institution.
- 460 G. Members of evaluation committees serve without remuneration except for reimbursement  
 461 of related out-of-pocket expenses, travel, meals, and other costs incurred.

462 H. Committees are responsible for conducting their work and preparing their reports  
463 according to the guidelines provided by the Board of Commissioners in its *Handbook of*  
464 *Accreditation*.

465 **IX. Policy on Disclosure and Confidentiality**

466 A. Accredited status ~~*Membership List*~~:

467 1. The Commission will publish a list of its ~~Members in the~~ *Membership List* on the  
468 ATS Wweb site. *The Membership List* reports the formal accredited status of schools,  
469 including accreditation status, approved degree programs, approved degrees at  
470 locations other than the institution’s primary location, approved programs of distance  
471 learning, the date of the most recent comprehensive visit, the date of the next  
472 scheduled visit, and reports required of schools during the current grant of  
473 accreditation. If the institution is on probation or has notations, this status shall also  
474 be disclosed. An institution’s entry will not be published until the period for receiving  
475 appeals of actions by the Board of Commissioners, as specified in these Procedures  
476 (Article XI below) and in the Bylaws of the Commission on Accrediting of the  
477 Association of Theological Schools (Section 2.14), has expired. No adverse  
478 accrediting action will be published while an appeal is in process. Adverse  
479 accrediting actions are defined in VII.H. above.

480 2. ~~B.~~ Accredited Members

481 1. ~~Institutions shall disclose the following information in complete accredited status in~~  
482 ~~their printed and/or electronic bulletin, calendar, or catalog: the status of their~~  
483 ~~accreditation with the following language “the school is accredited by the~~  
484 ~~Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools,” and provide~~  
485 ~~the and give the Commission’s mailing address and phone number. References shall~~  
486 ~~comply with the designations in the *Membership List*.~~ Schools shall also disclose the  
487 status of each degree program with the following language: “The following degree  
488 programs are approved by the Commission on Accrediting (name of degree  
489 programs).” When schools have been approved to offer full degree programs at more  
490 than one site, the school shall disclose this information as well.

491 3. ~~as to accredited status, approved degree programs, and approved locations for~~  
492 ~~offering degrees if other than the institution’s primary location. If the institution is on~~  
493 ~~probation, this status shall also be disclosed. Candidate Members shall publish their~~  
494 ~~formal status with the Commission as “Candidates for Accredited Status.”~~

495 2. ~~The *Membership List* reports the formal accredited status of schools and will not be~~  
496 ~~published until the period for receiving appeals of actions by the Board of~~

497                   Commissioners, as specified in these Procedures (Article X below) and in the Bylaws  
 498                   of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools (Section  
 499                   2.14), has expired. No adverse accrediting action will be published while an appeal is  
 500                   in process. Adverse accrediting actions are defined in VI.H. above.

501                   ~~C. Candidate Members: The institution shall publish its formal status with the Commission.~~

502                   B. Self-study reports

- 503                   1. An institution may release for internal or public distribution the contents of its self-  
 504                   study.
- 505                   2. The Board of Commissioners may permit representatives from member institutions  
 506                   access to another institution's self-study report to aid in the self-study process. This  
 507                   access will be permitted only if an institution has given prior approval for use of its  
 508                   self-study in this way. The Board of Commissioners may also approve the use of self-  
 509                   study reports by educators who are conducting research, the purpose of which is the  
 510                   improvement of the accrediting process. The Council for Higher Education  
 511                   Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education may be allowed access to self-  
 512                   study reports in conjunction with the process of recognition that the Board of  
 513                   Commissioners undergoes with these entities.

514                   ~~C. E.~~—Evaluation committee reports

- 515                   1. As part of the accreditation process, reports prepared by evaluation committees of the  
 516                   Board of Commissioners shall be made available to governing boards and faculties by  
 517                   the chief executive officers of the schools.
- 518                   2. An institution may make public the report of an evaluation committee, although this  
 519                   is not mandatory and is not advisable prior to formal action by the Board of  
 520                   Commissioners. If the institution makes a report public, it must make clear that the  
 521                   document is a report of the evaluation committee to the Board of Commissioners and  
 522                   is not an action of the Board of Commissioners.
- 523                   3. The recommendations of the evaluation committee to the Board of Commissioners  
 524                   shall not be published by the institution as actions. Only the actions of the Board of  
 525                   Commissioners comprise the formal accreditation.
- 526                   4. If, in the judgment of the Board of Commissioners, a school publishes selected  
 527                   portions of a report on an accreditation visit in such a way as to distort the overall  
 528                   import of that report, the Board of Commissioners has the authority to release the full  
 529                   text of the report in question.

530 5. The Board of Commissioners will not release evaluation committee reports to the  
531 public. With the approval of the institution, the Board of Commissioners may approve  
532 access to a report to those conducting research that contributes to the improvement of  
533 the accrediting process. Evaluation committee reports may be examined by the  
534 Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education  
535 only in the context of reviews of the Board of Commissioners by those agencies, for  
536 the purpose of recognition. Evaluation committee reports will also be shared with  
537 regional accrediting agencies in the case of dually accredited schools.

538 | D.F. Other accrediting documents

539 1. Minutes of the Board of Commissioners are available to the members of the Board of  
540 Commissioners. A summary report of all actions of the Board of Commissioners is  
541 published biennially in the *ATS Bulletin*.

542 2. An institution that has officially appealed an adverse action of the Board of  
543 Commissioners may request those sections of official minutes that pertain to the  
544 adverse action.

545 3. Correspondence between the Board of Commissioners and a Member or an applying  
546 institution shall be treated confidentially by both parties.

547 | 4. Institutional ~~progress and follow-up~~ reports will not be released to the public by the  
548 Board of Commissioners. These reports, however, may be released by the institution  
549 after action has been taken by the Board of Commissioners.

550 5. The Board of Commissioners will share its correspondence to member schools with  
551 the appropriate regional accrediting agencies, with the Council for Higher Education  
552 Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education in conjunction with the  
553 recognition process, and, as required, with appropriate state or provincial authorities.

554 | E.G. Public statements by institutions

555 If an institution uses the public forum to take issue with an action by the Board of  
556 Commissioners relating to that institution, the chair of the Board of Commissioners may  
557 make available to the public any information pertinent to the decision. “Taking issue in a  
558 public forum” does not include an announcement by an institution that it intends to  
559 appeal an action of the Board of Commissioners.

560 | F.H. Disclosure by the Board of Commissioners of information about Member or applying  
561 institutions

- 562 1. Upon inquiry, the Board of Commissioners will release the following information  
563 about Member or applying institutions:
- 564 a. Membership and accredited status.
- 565 b. The dates when the Board of Commissioners conferred candidate for accredited  
566 status and, as relevant, granted initial accreditation.
- 567 c. The dates of the last comprehensive evaluation and of the next scheduled  
568 comprehensive evaluation.
- 569 d. The date of the next scheduled focused visit and formal reasons for the visit.
- 570 e. The date a formal application for membership began and the estimated date a  
571 decision on the application will be made.
- 572 f. The date of denial of candidacy or removal from candidacy.
- 573 g. The submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required  
574 by the Board of Commissioners.
- 575 h. The Board of Commissioners' action subsequent to the last evaluation visit  
576 regarding accreditation.
- 577 i. Whether an institution has appealed an adverse accrediting action of the Board of  
578 Commissioners and the status and outcome of such appeal.
- 579 j. Actions of the appropriate appeal bodies with reasons for the actions.
- 580 2. The *Membership List* will identify institutions removed from candidacy or accredited  
581 membership, placed on probation, or withdrawing from candidacy or accredited  
582 membership.
- 583 3. The summary report of the Board of Commissioners, published biennially, identifies  
584 institutions removed from candidacy or accredited membership, placed on probation,  
585 or withdrawing from candidacy or accredited membership during the period of the  
586 report.
- 587 4. In all cases of adverse accrediting actions, a public statement about the action will be  
588 prepared in consultation with the institution for response to inquiries. The Board of  
589 Commissioners reserves the right to make final determination of the nature and  
590 content of the public statement. The Board of Commissioners will identify the  
591 reasons for the adverse accrediting action in the public statement.

592 **XI. Appeals of Actions by the Board of Commissioners**

593 (cf. Bylaws of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools,  
594 Section 2.14, Appeal of Accreditation Decisions)

595 A. Unless otherwise specified, the time for requesting an appeal shall be within thirty days  
596 from receipt of the letter reporting the action of the Board of Commissioners. The request  
597 for an appeal shall be in writing. Appeals are limited to decisions identified in sections B.  
598 and C. below.

599 B. Regarding actions of the Board of Commissioners related to the failure to approve new  
600 degrees, extension sites, or distance education programs, the imposition of a notation, or  
601 the imposition of probation:

602 1. If the institution believes that the action of the Board of Commissioners is unjust or  
603 based on erroneous information, the institution shall, either on its own initiative or at  
604 the invitation of the Board of Commissioners, first ~~arrange to~~ meet with ~~at least~~ three  
605 Commissioners appointed by the chair of the Board of Commissioners to seek a  
606 mutually satisfactory resolution. The response of the Board of Commissioners to a  
607 written appeal, including relevant specifics, shall be communicated in writing.

608 2. If, after such consultation, the institution believes the action of the Board of  
609 Commissioners still to be unjust or based on erroneous information, it shall have the  
610 right to appeal in writing within sixty days of the receipt of the written findings, to the  
611 Appeals Panel as elected biennially by member schools. Within 120 days after  
612 receiving the notice of appeal, accompanied by a consent and waiver to be bound by  
613 the provisions therein and hereof, the Appeals Panel shall arrange for a hearing to  
614 review the findings of the Board of Commissioners and the position of such Member.  
615 The recommendation of the Appeals Panel, including relevant specifics, shall be  
616 made to the Board of Commissioners, which shall act on the recommendation. The  
617 decision of the Board of Commissioners shall be communicated in writing and shall  
618 be final and binding in accordance with the consent and waiver referenced herein  
619 (and as submitted concurrent with the appeal procedures).

620 C. Regarding adverse actions of the Board of Commissioners that are defined by the  
621 Procedures as failure to grant initial accreditation or withdrawal of accreditation:

622 1. If the institution believes that the action of the Board of Commissioners is unjust or  
623 based on erroneous information, the institution shall, either on its own initiative or at  
624 the invitation of the Board of Commissioners, first meet with three Commissioners  
625 appointed by the chair of the Board of Commissioners to seek a mutually

626 satisfactory resolution. The response of the Board of Commissioners to a written  
627 appeal, including relevant specifics, shall be communicated in writing.

628 2. If, after such consultation, the institution believes the action of the Board of  
629 Commissioners still to be unjust or based on erroneous information, it shall have the  
630 right to appeal in writing within sixty days of the receipt of the written findings, to  
631 the Appeals Panel as elected biennially by member schools. Within 120 days after  
632 receiving the notice of appeal, accompanied by a consent and waiver to be bound by  
633 the provisions therein and hereof, the Appeals Panel shall arrange for a hearing to  
634 review the findings of the Board of Commissioners and the position of such  
635 Member. The Appeals Panel shall make a decision to affirm, amend, or reverse the  
636 adverse action, or remand to the Board of Commissioners with instruction regarding  
637 its conclusions. The decision of the Appeals Panel is final and binding on both the  
638 Board of Commissioners and member school. The Board of Commissioners in all  
639 cases will be responsible for implementing the decision.

640 D. The Board of Commissioners and the moving party/parties shall have the right to  
641 representation in person and by counsel, if desired, at any level of appeal, and the school  
642 may provide new or additional information at any level of appeal that further demonstrates  
643 that the school is appropriately implementing the standards of accrediting.

644 **XII. Complaints**

645 The Commission has an obligation to the various publics it serves to give responsible  
646 consideration to complaints that may be made against any accredited school. The Board of  
647 Commissioners maintains policies and procedures for reviewing and responding to complaints.  
648 The complaint must be filed in writing, together with substantial documentation, as appropriate  
649 for the circumstance. The Board of Commissioners will determine if the complaint has standing  
650 with reference to any membership criterion or accreditation standard of the Commission. If the  
651 complaint has standing, the Board of Commissioners will conduct an investigation. The Board of  
652 Commissioners will communicate its conclusions and actions to the institution and the party  
653 raising the complaint. The Board of Commissioners assumes no responsibility for or obligation  
654 to adjudicate individual grievances.

655 **XIII. Dual Accreditation**

656 A. Any institution seeking or holding accreditation by more than one accrediting body  
657 recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation or the U.S. Department of  
658 Education must describe itself in identical terms to each recognized accrediting body with  
659 regard to purpose, governance, programs, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel,

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660 finances, and constituents; and it must keep each accrediting body apprised of any change  
661 in its status with one or another accrediting body.

662 B. The Board of Commissioners will withhold actions granting reaffirmation of  
663 accreditation, granting candidacy for accredited status, or extending the term of  
664 candidacy to any institution that is currently subject to (1) an adverse accrediting action  
665 by another accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or (2) an  
666 action by an appropriate governmental authority that may lead to suspension, revocation,  
667 or termination of the school's legal authority to provide degree-granting higher education.  
668 If, after review, the Board of Commissioners determines that the institution is in  
669 compliance with Commission standards, it will proceed with the actions appropriate to  
670 Commission procedures, criteria, and standards.

671 C. The Board of Commissioners will withhold actions granting reaffirmation of accreditation,  
672 granting candidacy for accredited status, or extending candidacy status to a college-related  
673 or university-related theological school, if the institution to which it is related is currently  
674 subject to an adverse action by another accrediting agency recognized by the U.S.  
675 Department of Education or an interim action by a governmental agency leading to  
676 suspension, revocation, or termination of the institution's authority to offer degree-granting  
677 higher education. If, after review, the Board of Commissioners determines to grant  
678 candidacy, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation to schools related to  
679 colleges or universities, subject to the conditions noted above, the Board of Commissioners  
680 will provide an explanation for its action to the U.S. Secretary of Education and to the  
681 recognized accrediting agency.

682 D. Schools accredited by the Commission on Accrediting and other recognized accrediting  
683 agencies in the United States and Canada may request a joint comprehensive evaluation  
684 visit conducted by both agencies. The Commission on Accrediting will conduct joint  
685 visits if the other agency agrees, and if the joint evaluation procedures do not  
686 compromise the independence and consistency of the Board of Commissioners'  
687 accreditation decisions.