

*Evaluation and the Types of
Textual Material in the Standards*

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

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

Most of Standard 3, for example, is devoted to a description of quality in “theological scholarship,” as understood by the community of theological schools comprising the Commission on Accrediting of ATS. The standard describes theological scholarship in terms of the activities of learning, teaching, and research (3.1) and discusses, at some length, the characteristics of theological scholarship (3.2). This type of text is a “standard” because it defines quality for a central component of theological education. Few self-study committees will be able to read Standard 3 and conclude that scholarship at their school reflects all the characteristics described in the standard. They will more likely conclude that it does not, but that if it did, theological scholarship at their school would be better.

The accrediting evaluation task, in the context of this kind of material in a standard, is for the school to determine which of the qualities in the standard are most evident in the school and which are inadequately present or absent altogether. Following this