



The Association of Theological Schools The Commission on Accrediting

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June 2020 COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines ATS Commission on Accrediting

In March 2020 the ATS Board of Commissioners (Board) issued [COVID-19 Accreditation Guidelines](#) for the current health crisis that: (a) waived residency requirements for all degree programs; (b) permitted schools without comprehensive distance education approval to deliver their programs through any distance education technologies that provide regular and substantive interaction; and (c) authorized Commission staff, in consultation with member schools and visiting committees, either to postpone scheduled accreditation visits or to conduct those visits virtually through interactive technologies. Any visit for initial accreditation or for reaffirmation conducted virtually required an in-person, follow-up visit when reasonable and safe to do so. Any postponed visit for reaffirmation also extended the period of accreditation accordingly. The March 2020 guidelines followed [guidance](#) issued to accrediting agencies by the US Department of Education (USDE) on March 17.

On June 1, 2020, the Board updated its March 2020 guidelines by clarifying that the flexibilities described above extend through December 2020—based on [UPDATED Guidance](#) issued by the USDE on May 15. Commission staff will continue to consult with member schools, visiting committees, and the ATS Executive Director regarding whether to conduct fall 2020 visits in person, to postpone them (by up to one year), or to conduct those visits virtually through interactive technologies. Any virtual visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation requires an in-person, follow-up visit when reasonably safe and practicable to do so. A key purpose of the follow-up visit, which may be conducted by a staff member or a visiting committee member, is to confirm the presence of facilities viewed during the virtual site visit (as required by federal regulations). Schools and the Board should document any accreditation-related actions taken under these guidelines.

NOTE: Schools without comprehensive distance education approval that desire to offer at least half of a degree online after fall 2020 must submit by October 1, 2020, a petition for comprehensive distance education approval, which the Board of Commissioners will consider at its November 2020 meeting. The Board, however, will not count toward the “at least half a degree” petition threshold any courses that a school offers online primarily due to the current health crisis. If you have any questions, please consult your ATS Commission staff liaison.