

## APPENDIX N

### WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

Organizations desire approval from many different sources. As participants in educational ministries, the first “stamp of approval” we should desire is from God, because He desires all people to know Him and serve Him to their fullest potential. Therefore, the “call” to ministry and the “field” of service must be settled with the caller, who is God.

Once committed to God’s mission, approval, at a variety of levels, is sought from the organization’s supporters. For example, a local church may launch a formal effort to structure studies that produce future leaders for that specific church. In this case, the approval of the local church members and/or elders may be sufficient. If such a local church “school” is financially sponsored (or governed) outside that local congregation (such as a denomination or network), additional approval may be desired.

As organizations broaden their relationships, it is easy to see why official sanctions increase and become more valuable. When ministries purposely take on an academic mission, a uniform and transferable standard attracts more students and increases credibility among supporters. Why? Because (1) students will not lose time and effort if they need to move away and (2) everyone involved (faculty, students, administrators, supporters) will function with the same expectations. In academia, this monitoring process is called “accreditation.”

Early in the Bible Institute movement, this type of regulation and professional association would give necessary strength and encouragement to the growth process. Bible Institutes began offering more general studies and soon grew into Bible Colleges with three, four, and five year programs. Since the early days of the Bible Institute movement (1930), ETTA (now ETA, Evangelical Training Association) has been a champion for “advancing the high standards of Christian Education.” Founded by five Bible Colleges, the organization offered services to Christian Education both in the discipline of an academic classroom as well as the local church. With the birth of AABC (now ABHE) in 1947, the governing duties of accreditation (self-study evaluation, financial accountability, school-wide educational responsibility, etc.) for Bible colleges was relinquished to them.

ETA now continues to offer many professional services. However, **ETA is not an academic accrediting body.** ETA works *with* agencies, recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, who specialize in accreditation. Always ask for the “conditions of eligibility” and/or “accreditation criteria” when communicating with these agencies:

For Christian colleges and “non-traditional” programs:  
(TRACS) Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools  
P.O. Box 328  
Forest, VA 24551  
phone: (434)525-9539  
fax: (434)525-9538  
<http://www.tracs.org/>  
e-mail: [info@tracs.org](mailto:info@tracs.org)

Exclusively for Bible Colleges:  
(ABHE) The Association for Biblical Higher Education (formerly AABC)  
5575 S. Semoran Blvd., Suite 26  
Orlando, FL 32822-1781  
phone: (407) 207-0808  
fax: (407) 207-0840  
email: [info@abhe.org](mailto:info@abhe.org)  
website: [www.abhe.org](http://www.abhe.org)

Exclusively for post-baccalaureate programs:  
(ATS) Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada  
10 Summit Park Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15275-1103  
phone: (412) 788-6505 and (800) 367-8250  
fax: (412) 788-6510  
<http://www.ats.edu/>  
email: [ats@ats.edu](mailto:ats@ats.edu)

ETA bears no claim to accreditation for academic institutions or programs. Rather, it maintains an extension database to work along side the above stated agencies. The mission of ETA is to counsel, promote, and participate in supportive services for the Christian Education Departments (or Educational Ministries as some prefer) within these schools. Transfer credits must be handled by the specific school of choice, under the conditions set forth by their state, their accrediting association, and the specific degree program where transfer credit would be applied.

ETA also encourages accreditation seekers to contact their state Department of Education for the “Regional” accrediting agency to which your state belongs. This is especially important for schools offering programs other than Christian ministries.

(MSA) Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools  
(NCA) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools  
(NWASC) Northwest Association of Colleges and Schools  
(SACS) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
(WASC) Western Association of Colleges and Schools  
(CETA) Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association

Within 1997-98, The United States Department of Education has been restructured and a new criteria was declared for recognizing (in the eyes of the government) credible and solvent educational institutions. The Christian agencies listed above dedicate themselves full time to maintaining the balance between “rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Mt. 22:21)

Steve Levicoff, in **Name It and Frame It**, attempts to help us understand “the world of accrediting.” He divides his information into two parts termed “institutional accreditation” and “specialized (or program) accreditation.” He says this:

Institutional accreditation deals with the entire institution and is conducted by elected commissions, small professional staffs, and volunteer consultants and evaluation team members . . . . Specialized accrediting agencies work with constituent programs or clusters of programs within postsecondary institutions [degree-granting]. Not every institution with a program for which an accrediting agency exists seeks accreditation from that agency. But institutions do have relationships with more than one agency (some institutions work with several) . . . . Both types of accreditation use elected peer commissions to develop policies, standards, and procedures.

Ralph Enlow, former Executive Director for AABC (now ABHE), states it this way:

Accreditation is primarily about two things: assurance and quality. It assures prospective students, families, communities, and other educational institutions that a college is accomplishing its mission with integrity and a commendable measure of excellence. It also functions as a catalyst to spur institutions toward ongoing effectiveness and continuous improvement. If assurance and improvement are important to you and your trustees, then you may indeed be an excellent candidate for accreditation.

Even if you decide against membership of any kind at this time, ETA and ABHE offer many resources to help you improve the effectiveness of your institution. *Developing a Dynamic Bible Institute* is designed for new efforts wanting to evaluate the framework for organization. Its workbook approach will allow you and your leadership to discuss the pertinent issues of faculty, facility, finances, curriculum, etc. It can be purchased through ETA.