



Handbook of Certification

Section One

2013

An Introduction to AETH's Certification	3
Historic Background	3
The Meaning of AETH's Certification	3
The Purposes of the Certification	4
The Components of the Certification	4
Institutional Self-Evaluation	4
Peer Review	4
Executive Council	5
The Benefits of the Certification	5
Institutions	5
Internal Constituencies: Students, Faculty, and Administration	5
External Constituencies: Denominations, Financial Supporters, and the Public	6
AETH's Certification Educational and Institutional Standards	7 - 12
Educational Standards	7
General Institutional Standards	10

An Introduction to AETH Certification by the Committee of Certification¹

Historic Background

From the beginning, essential to AETH's mission has been the development and formation of pastoral leadership at all possible levels: local church, bible institute, and seminary. For AETH bible institutes in particular play a crucial role in fulfilling its mission of *developing the leaders to radically transform the church and the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Canada, contributing to their vibrancy, health and growth*. AETH has long recognized and continues to affirm the valuable work that most Bible Institutes have undertaken in preparing pastors and lay leaders for the work of ministry within the Hispanic/Latino churches; work that for decades has barely being recognized beyond denominational judicatories and/or local congregational boundaries.

For this reason, and in light of the new demographic and cultural conditions confronting theological education during the first decade of the twenty first century, AETH took the initiative of creating institutional and educational standards for the certification of bible institutes with two goals in mind: (a) to promote and improve the theological education of eligible Bible institutes so that their graduates function at a baccalaureate level and are equipped to become leaders for the radical transformation of church and society, and (b) to provide accessible pathways to enrollment in ATS-accredited graduate theological schools for graduates of AETH-certified Bible institutes. Thus, thanks to a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, starting in July of 2011 and for eighteen months a joint AETH/ATS commission worked on the study and development of standards and basic guidelines of a process of certification. Both, standards and process, were presented to and approved by the Board of Commissioners of ATS in February of 2013, allowing AETH to begin right away with the implementation of its Certification of Bible Institutes.

This section of the *Handbook of Certification* explains first the meaning, purposes, characteristics, and benefits of Committee certification. Then it describes in detail the educational and institutional standards that guide the work of AETH's Certification Committee (Committee).

Meaning of AETH's Certification

AETH's Certification constitutes an external confirmation that a given program of a Bible institute complies with the minimal educational and institutional standards to be equivalent to baccalaureate level studies and, therefore, is capable of fulfilling the stated goals of the Certification standards and process. AETH's Certification does not confer any legal authority or status on bible institutes, which have the full responsibility of functioning and delivering educational programs according to state and local governmental laws. The most technical meaning of "certified" is that a certifying agency has evaluated a school and determined that it functions according to the standards of quality adopted by the agency. Bible institutes that are eligible for AETH's Certification go through a process that includes fundamentally three stages: a. institutional self-evaluation, b. verification of standards by visiting team

¹ This general presentation is based on the Report of the AETH/ATS joint Commission for Certification of Bible Institutes which was approved by the Board of Commissioners of ATS in February of 2013.

and c. granting of certification by Certification Committee and AETH's Executive Council. It should be understood by all involved that AETH's certification is distinct from the accreditation process used for graduate theological schools as conducted by the Commission on Accreditation of ATS.

The Purposes of AETH's Certification

AETH Certification has two purposes. The first is to ensure that eligible bible institutes function according to *standards of institutional and educational quality*. Whatever the definition of quality contained in certifying standards, the process of AETH's certification seeks to ensure that, at the very least, some acceptable level of these standards of quality is present in a certified institution. The second purpose of certification is the *improvement* of institutions and their educational programs. Institutions that have clearly met basic standards of quality should improve, both institutionally and educationally, and certification is a process that encourages that improvement. Certification has other purposes, but these two are the most common and central to the Committee's approach to certification.

As a result of the institutional and educational improvement of bible institutes, their graduates will be equipped to become leaders for the radical transformation of church and society. AETH Certification will ensure that their graduates function at a baccalaureate level and that they can enroll in ATS-accredited graduate theological schools.

The Components of AETH Certification

The activities of certification have a variety of characteristics, including agreed-upon standards and procedures, the process of institutional self-study, the process of peer review, and the work of the Committee and Executive Council of AETH.

Institutional Self-Study

Through a process of self-study, an institution engages in a sustained and serious evaluation of itself in the context of standards adopted by AETH. A good self-study evaluates the school's strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness in light of the Committee standards and the institution's purpose and goals. Institutions should use the self-study process to identify how the school is implementing the expectations of the standards, to identify how the school can improve, and to contribute to institutional planning. The self-study report should be fair, candid, and thoughtfully informative for the school and the peer review committee. The *Handbook* provides comprehensive guidance about the self-study process in Section Two, "Guidelines for Conducting an Institutional Self-Study."

Site Visit Peer Review

Certification evaluation involves a process of peer review. Individuals are chosen to evaluate an institution because of their general competence in theological education and specific areas of expertise—academics, finances, administration, library, student services, etc. They have been trained in the interpretation and application of the standards as well as procedures for their work as certification evaluation team members. Their task is to review the school's own self-study and evaluate the institution and its educational programs in the context of the Committee certifying standards, prepare a

report and recommendations to be considered by the Committee, and serve the school by helping it identify its strengths and weaknesses.

Section Four of this *Handbook* provides extensive counsel for persons serving on certification evaluation committees, “Guidelines for Members of Certification Evaluation Teams.” Section Three of the *Handbook*, “Guidelines for Institutions Receiving Certification Evaluation Teams,” provides guidelines for institutional preparation and hosting of certification evaluation teams.

Executive Council Committee

The Council is charged with the responsibility of officially granting the Certified Status to bible institutes that have successfully complete the Certification process, of maintaining the list of certified bible institutes and of ensuring that the Certification standards are fairly implemented across the certified members. In making its decisions, the Council relies on the reports of the teams that have visited schools, is bound by the procedures adopted by the Committee, and interprets and implements the Standards of Certification.

Benefits of AETH’s Certification

Because the purposes of AETH Certification are to ensure standards of quality and to facilitate the improvement of theological schools, the benefits of certification accrue from the attainment of these purposes. These benefits, however, are experienced in different ways by the institutions, by their internal constituencies, and by their external constituencies.

Institutions

The primary benefit to institutions is certification’s impetus toward improvement. Improvement may be prompted as a consequence of schools’ efforts to meet AETH’s General Institutional and Educational Standards, by the assessment of external peer reviewers, or by the judgment about institutional strengths and areas of needed growth reflected in decisions by the Committee. Many bible institutes, for example, may complete their self-study and perceive that the process itself resulted in significant improvement for the school, quite apart from the evaluation committee’s findings or the Committee’s actions.

Institutions also benefit from their certification when other agencies or institutions make judgments about the bible institute on the basis of its certified status. Certification thus provides an external assessment of the quality of the school and its educational programs, which other institutions and agencies then accept.

Internal Constituencies: Students, Faculty, and Administration

Students benefit from their school’s certification. Students benefit from a certification process that ensures the academic and professional integrity of the certificates they earn. While this may mean more or harder work to complete the program, it ensures students that their work exposes them to the disciplines and practices recognized as important for theological study and allows them to enroll in ATS Accredited Seminaries in the United States, Puerto Rico and Canada.

AETH standards support the central role of faculty in theological education, articulate the freedom of inquiry necessary for good teaching, and provide guidance for many of the educational and professional roles faculty assume. As the standards provide an impetus for institutional improvement, bible institutes become better places to teach, learn, and serve the Church.

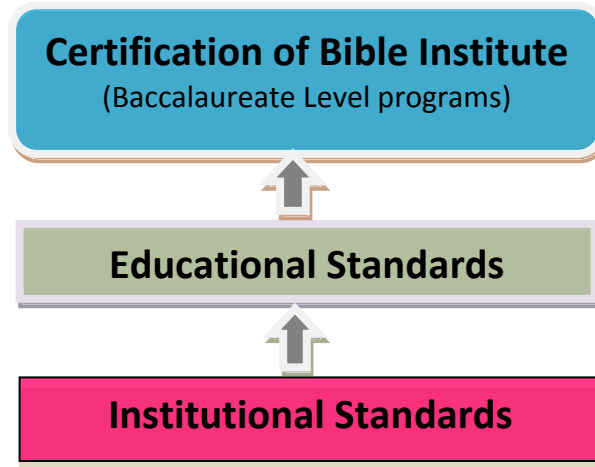
Certification also serves administrators, particularly as it provides guidance to a wide range of institutional functions, supports appropriate and fair patterns of governance, and offers an external pattern of review that can help a school understand what it does well and where it needs to improve.

External Constituencies: Denominations, Financial Supporters, and the Public

Certification benefits the denominations and other constituencies that support bible institutes. It provides an external review of institutions that, in turn, can help supporting constituencies determine how others judge the quality of “their” school. It also provides a normative standard for Bible Institutes. A denomination or congregation, for example, can assume that a certificate earned from any AETH certified school reflects common expectations of educational achievement and curricular exposure to the disciplines of theological and ministerial studies. Still another benefit to external constituencies is the exposure certification provides to agreed-upon patterns of good practice.

Financial supporters of certified bible institutes can benefit from certification in a way similar to their benefit from financial auditing. The function of certification, while it is not an audit, provides an external, independent judgment about the strengths and weaknesses of an institution and encourages wise use of its resources and careful attention to its mission. These forms of accountability ensure financial supporters that the institution is engaged in appropriate educational efforts and that those efforts conform to normative expectations of quality. Certification also benefits a wider public, which is often uninformed about bible institutes.

As illustrated in the diagram below, AETH's Certification is based on educational and institutional standards created by the joint AETH/ATS Commission on Certification of Bible Institutes, which were respectively approved by AETH's Executive Council and the Board of Commissioners of ATS.



Educational Standards

All learning institutions have, as a general goal, certain learning and formational expectations that guide and inform their curriculum. Institutions offering master degrees assume that students entering their degree programs have achieved the competencies described below for baccalaureate programs and degrees.

Certified AETH Bible Institute programs must meet two sets of criteria: a) criteria to establish BA equivalency and b) criteria for curricular learning goals. Certified programs shall demonstrate that they provide their students the BA equivalency and a core curriculum necessary for admission in ATS accredited seminaries.

Seven Criteria to Meet Baccalaureate Equivalency

Bible Institutes teaching at the baccalaureate level develop programs that engage students in an integrated course of study. *AETH certified programs will demonstrate the embedded criteria that show learning equivalency to the general education requirements of BA programs.* Certified programs ensure the development of core knowledge and learning competencies in the following areas:

- 1] Research, Writing, and Oral Communication:** Students develop appropriate research skills for academic work, and effective written and oral communication in English and/or Spanish.
- 2] Critical analysis:** Students assess information sources, arguments and data in light of criteria such as: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasoning skills, depth, breadth, and fairness. They are able to develop or follow written or verbal arguments using these criteria.

3] Information literacy: Students are able to find and use common digital and printed information resources; engage in library research; use computers and the internet; and seek out expert opinion and advice when needed.

4] Quantitative skills: Students use mathematical ideas to accomplish a variety of tasks in classroom or church settings, such as: budget development; fund raising; financial management; strategic planning; etc.

5] Civic responsibility: Students gain familiarity with theories of the social sciences in order to enhance their understandings of the major institutions in our society, and the roles that both individuals and groups play in shaping social, political, economic, cultural, and religious processes and structures.

6] Cultural competency: Students learn about people from various national cultures and backgrounds, including awareness of the contributions of Western and non-Western cultures, women, and ethnic groups to the rich diversity of life in society and the churches. They also gain awareness of their own cultural identities and are able to recognize differences and similarities in and among cultural groups in order to engage in effective cross-cultural communication.

7] Science and technology: Students develop an understanding of the importance of science in the workings of the physical universe; the origins and varieties of life on this planet; the interdependence of creatures in ecological systems; human development; mental and physical health; human sexuality and reproduction; etc. They also learn about the benefits and challenges of standard and experimental technologies that impact human life and the environment.

Bible Institutes integrate these areas of knowledge and competency in their course of study or they can partner with Community Colleges or Universities to support BA equivalency in these areas.

Nine Criteria to Meet AETH Curricular Learning Goals

The following statement of learning goals provides the framework for AETH assessment of BA equivalency for admission to ATS accredited seminaries. Theological programs within Bible institutes that are “seminary bound” provide an integrated course of study with clear curricular learning goals. AETH identifies three main curricular areas and ten learning goals to assess Bible Institute programs at the baccalaureate level. AETH certified programs will offer courses in each area that will enable students to achieve the learning goals defined under that area.

Christian Faith: Bible, Theology and History. Courses will enable students to:

1. Achieve a thorough understanding of the Bible, and an attention to the mission, history and theologies of the church, including heritage and tradition of the school.

TYPICAL COURSES to achieve these goals include: Old Testament studies, New Testament studies, Church History, Theology, Biblical Hermeneutics, Hispanic theology, Latin American theology, Denominational history and polity; Hispanic approaches to biblical interpretation for social context.

Ministerial Capacity from Latina/o Perspectives. Courses will enable students to:

2. Do focused research on Latina/o contributions to mission and theology, with particular emphasis on 20th Century Latina/o leaders and scholars, and prepare written and oral reports of their contributions, and the implications for the church in the 21st Century.
3. Develop a holistic understanding of our relationship with God and others and creation as expressed in our care and serving in Hispanic communities.
4. Develop a theological basis for diverse expressions of Christian worship, education, service, and spiritual formation informed by the diverse needs and practices within Hispanic congregations and communities.
5. Learn leadership skills for building mission driven communities of faith that include methods for crisis management, community empowerment and social transformation.

TYPICAL COURSES to achieve these goals include: Historical theology, Latina/o Christian Leaders, Hispanic Leaders of 20th Century, Christian Education, The gospel in urban context, Spiritual formation, Group spiritual direction; Christian worship, pastoral theology, internship/practicum, Crisis counseling, substance abuse counseling, crisis intervention, the use of the Bible in counseling/biblical counseling; social justice, community development.

Breadth of Curriculum Engaging Culture/Context. Courses will enable students to:

6. Demonstrate basic competencies in the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, political science), such as cultural intelligence, cultural exegesis, and framing biblical understandings of ministry in pluralist or culturally diverse contexts.
7. Demonstrate basic competencies in finance and mathematics, including budgeting for ministries and financial accountability.
8. Demonstrate basic competencies in information literacy for research, critical analysis and application of data constructively, leading to social and prophetic initiatives in areas such as poverty, teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, immigration, domestic violence, dropout, social justice, etc.
9. Demonstrate basic knowledge in the natural sciences, accompanied with the capacity for ethical reasoning on issues such as technology, human development, sexuality, physical and mental health, environmental and ecology.

TYPICAL COURSES to achieve these goals include: Hispanic theology, Family Counseling, Ecology and the Bible, Church and Social Justice, Anthropology and Missions, Cross-cultural communication, Intergeneration Ministry, Christian ethics, Faith and Human Development, Ministry to immigrants, Church Administration, etc.

General Institutional Standards

Institutional Standards for Bible institutes seeking program certification have been identified and adapted from the Association of Theological Schools standards. The AETH/ATS Commission concluded that institutes that adhere to the following five standards would provide the organizational stability and strength essential to certification. To say it another way, these five standards are needed to ensure that the programs/curriculum described in the previous section will be offered by institutes that are both sustainable and continuously improving.

Purpose, planning and evaluation

- Mission/vision statement (core values). The institute's statement of purpose should articulate the mission to which the institute believes it is called and define its particular identity and values, including confessional beliefs and commitments. The statement of purpose should be reviewed and updated as needed by the leadership and governing body of the institute and should engage all appropriate constituencies (e.g., trustees, faculty, administration, staff, students, and ecclesiastical bodies). Adapted from ATS Standard 1.1.1
- Strategic plan (long range). The bible institute should develop and annually update a five-year strategic plan that will provide a road map for the intentional implementation of the mission/vision. The plan should anticipate and address issues of future development and growth by building upon strengths, overcoming weaknesses, seizing opportunities, and planning in such a manner as to minimize the impact of threats. (SWOT Analysis).
- Business plan/operational plan (short term 1-2 years). Bible institutes shall ensure that revenues, expenditures, and capital projects are both approved by appropriate authorities and managed carefully by authorized administrators in compliance with sound fiscal practices. This plan should clearly reflect the priorities and direction established by the strategic plan of the school.
- Feasibility studies (in reference to new programs). When the strategic plan calls for new programs, the institute will conduct feasibility studies to ensure that there are sufficient constituencies in support of the program (e.g. churches, para-church organizations, and/or community development entities) as well as sufficient potential students to ensure the success of the program. Feasibility studies shall include time lines for the development and implementation of the program including dates for the completion of curriculum design, recruitment of faculty, marketing among constituencies, recruitment and enrollment of students.
- Programmatic objectives. All programs shall clearly state the goals and objectives for the program including student learning outcomes in keeping with the curriculum criteria described in section one of this document.
- Assessment loop. In addition to the assessment that is part of the teaching/learning outcomes described in the previous section, the institute will develop and implement annual assessment programs that will analyze data pertinent to the five standards described in this section, in order to make the necessary changes to continue to build on strengths and overcome weaknesses.

Library and information resources

- Accessibility to adequate library resources must be established, including on-line resources, buying and purchasing books and periodicals at the residential site, as well as written partnerships/agreements with other libraries.
- Information literacy (adequate training of students to access informational resources) shall be promoted and nurtured through library educational programs available in a timely manner to all students. This will ensure the ability of all students to utilize all resources needed for an education that is equivalent to baccalaureate standards.
- The institute will maintain an adequate budget to support and expand the educational vision of the institution as embodied in various degree programs.

Faculty

- Institutes shall employ an adequate number of faculty to meet the educational goals of the institution.
- Faculty shall have academic credentials equal to or exceeding the master degree in their teaching field. In exceptional cases, individuals may teach in the areas of practical theology who may not possess a master degree but whose gifts and life experiences are apparent and beneficial to the educational goals of the institution.
- Faculty shall have ministerial experience appropriate for the mission of the institution and/or demonstrate investment in the life of the church and its mission to the community.
- The institute shall conduct ongoing evaluation of faculty teaching and shall provide resources for faculty development.
- Institutes are responsible for selecting and retaining faculty in a manner that is consistent with their mission/values and as much as possible mirrors the demographics of the student population.
- Faculty should receive remuneration commensurate with the expectation of high quality for the teaching learning process in order to fulfill the mission of the institution and to promote faculty retention.
- Faculty shall be recruited who are committed to the student learning outcomes articulated in the course syllabi.
- The institute shall develop a teaching/learning process that is oriented toward community transformation and empowerment. This includes relational (teacher/student, student interaction), instructional (resources, methods and goals) and contextual (analysis, understanding of societal, self, cultural and church realities) dimensions of theological formation.

Student Recruitment, Admissions and Services

In regard to student recruitment, admissions, and services, the Bible institute shall:

- Establish qualifications for candidates for baccalaureate level programs that include HS diploma, GED or equivalent, demonstrated reading and writing skills as well as some of

the following: references from pastor, spiritual mentor, and endorsement from local judicatory.

- Develop policies that ensure the integrity of expectations that apply to issues of placement.
- Provide students with an accessible catalog, bulletin or information describing its curriculum, certificates, and fees.
- Provide advising to support student development and progress toward the completion of degree and preparation for ministry in keeping with the vocational goals of the student.
- Develop programs that enable or enhance the study skills of the students entering the baccalaureate level program to help ensure their success.

Institutional Resources

- Institutes will develop and make readily available, written bylaws/regulations and/or comparable documents that define levels of institutional accountability as well as legal documents and authorization by applicable ecclesial, governmental and educational accrediting bodies. These documents must be periodically reviewed for compliance.
- Because the faculty is an essential resource for the achievement of institutional and educational goals, the institute will make the recruiting and sustaining of a stable, quality faculty a primary concern of the institution. Likewise, staff members are a valuable resource for the attainment of institutional and educational goals. Therefore, policies and procedures must be established for the protection and enhancement of staff, ensuring equity and fairness in the implementation and execution of those policies.
- The institute shall (a) engage the numbers and the qualities of personnel needed to implement the seminary/college bound programs in keeping with its purpose; (b) develop appropriate personnel policies and procedures to be approved by the board and implemented by the administration; (c) ensure that these policies are clear and adequately published; include reference to job performance evaluation, termination, sexual harassment or misconduct; and conform to applicable requirements mandated by federal, state, or provincial jurisdictions; (d) provide for equitable patterns of compensation; (e) provide clear written job descriptions for all employees; and (f) provide appropriate grievance procedures. 9.1.3*
- The institute must provide adequate classroom facilities to accommodate student needs. They should be safe and conducive for learning.
- When physical resources other than those owned by the institution are used by the school, written agreements should clearly state the conditions governing their use and ensure usage over a sufficient period of time.

**Indicates a category borrowed from ATS Revised Standards and direct quotes are footnoted with ATS Standards numbering.*