GCTEQA

GLOBAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION & QUALITY ASSURANCE, INC.

ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

2026 Public Edition

Diverse Traditions. Shared Standards. Global Excellence.

Independent accreditation and quality assurance for eligible theological, religious, faith-based, values-centered, and mission-driven educational institutions.

Public Notice & Scope

This handbook describes the accreditation framework, standards, review procedures, institutional responsibilities, and public-disclosure expectations of the Global Commission for Theological Education & Quality Assurance, Inc. ("GCTEQA"). It is intended for applicant institutions, accredited institutions, reviewers, students, stakeholders, and members of the public.

GCTEQA is an independent accreditation and quality-assurance organization. GCTEQA accreditation is an independent quality designation based on the institution's demonstrated compliance with applicable GCTEQA standards. It does not, by itself, constitute governmental authorization to operate, eligibility for U.S. federal student financial aid, professional licensure eligibility, immigration eligibility, guaranteed transfer of credit, or guaranteed acceptance of credentials by another institution, employer, licensing authority, government agency, or credential evaluator.

Important
Institutions remain responsible for complying with all applicable laws, regulations, registrations, licenses, exemptions, degree-authority requirements, and governmental or professional approvals in every jurisdiction in which they operate.

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1. About GCTEQA

Quality assurance that respects mission while requiring evidence.

The Global Commission for Theological Education & Quality Assurance, Inc. is an independent accreditation and quality-assurance organization established to promote educational quality, ethical governance, institutional integrity, learner protection, accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

GCTEQA serves eligible theological, religious, faith-based, values-centered, and mission-driven educational institutions representing diverse traditions, cultures, and educational models. GCTEQA does not require adherence to one particular denomination or religious tradition as a general condition of eligibility.

2. Mission, Vision & Core Principles

Mission

To promote excellence, integrity, accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement among theological, religious, faith-based, values-centered, and mission-driven educational institutions through standards, institutional evaluation, quality assurance, education, research, professional guidance, and related activities.

Vision

To advance a global culture of responsible, mission-sensitive educational quality in which diverse institutions demonstrate shared commitments to ethical leadership, learner protection, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement.

Core Principles

- Integrity - decisions are based on evidence, standards, and ethical conduct.
- Independence - accreditation judgments are protected from improper financial, personal, or institutional influence.
- Transparency - accreditation status, scope, limitations, and institutional responsibilities are communicated clearly.
- Respect for mission - institutions may retain their distinct theological, religious, cultural, and educational identities.
- Learner protection - truthful information, fair policies, records integrity, and responsible student services are essential.
- Continuous improvement - accreditation is an ongoing quality commitment, not a one-time event.

3. Scope of Accreditation

GCTEQA may accredit or conduct quality-assurance reviews for eligible institutions including colleges, universities, seminaries, Bible colleges, ministry schools, religious institutes, continuing education providers, training organizations, and other mission-driven educational entities.

Delivery Models

- Campus-based instruction
- Online and distance education

- Hybrid instruction
- Self-paced learning
- Cohort-based programs
- Continuing education and certificate programs

Degree and Non-Degree Education

GCTEQA may review both degree-granting and non-degree institutions. A degree-granting institution must independently demonstrate the legal authority, exemption, or other lawful basis required to offer degrees in the jurisdiction where it operates. GCTEQA accreditation is not itself degree-granting authority.

4. Eligibility Requirements

An institution should generally demonstrate the following before entering formal accreditation review:

- A clearly defined institutional name, mission, and educational purpose.
- Legal formation or organizational documentation appropriate to its structure.
- Applicable authorization, registration, exemption, or approval required by its jurisdiction.
- An identifiable governing structure and responsible institutional leadership.
- Written institutional policies and procedures.
- Clearly defined educational programs, curricula, or training offerings.
- Qualified personnel appropriate to the institution's mission and programs.
- Systems for student/participant records, academic records, and records protection.
- Published tuition, fees, refund policies, and material student disclosures.
- Student support practices appropriate to the delivery model.
- Financial and operational capacity sufficient to sustain the institution.
- Technology and instructional systems appropriate to its delivery model.
- Assessment and continuous-improvement practices.
- Commitment to truthful advertising and accurate representation of accreditation status.
- Willingness to provide evidence and participate fully in the evaluation process.

Eligibility permits an institution to proceed in the process; it does not guarantee accreditation.

5. Accreditation Standards

GCTEQA's institutional framework contains twelve core standards. Each standard is supported by criteria, evidence expectations, and review guidance contained in the Full Accreditation Standards Manual.

Standard 1: Mission, Identity & Integrity

The institution maintains a clear mission and demonstrates alignment between stated purpose and actual practice.

Standard 2: Legal Establishment & Authorization

The institution demonstrates lawful establishment and applicable authority to conduct its educational activities.

Standard 3: Governance, Leadership & Ethical Conduct

The institution maintains responsible governance, defined authority, ethical leadership, and accountability.

Standard 4: Financial Responsibility & Sustainability

The institution demonstrates sound financial management and capacity to sustain its mission and obligations.

Standard 5: Educational Programs & Curriculum

Programs are appropriately designed, documented, assessed, and aligned with stated educational outcomes.

Standard 6: Faculty, Instructional Staff & Development

Personnel qualifications, roles, records, and development practices support educational quality.

Standard 7: Admissions, Students & Learner Support

Admissions, services, records, grievances, and learner protections are fair, transparent, and appropriate.

Standard 8: Assessment & Educational Effectiveness

The institution evaluates learning, program effectiveness, and institutional performance and uses findings for improvement.

Standard 9: Online Learning, Technology & Information Security

Technology-supported education is accessible, reliable, secure, and adequately supported.

Standard 10: Student Protection, Wellbeing & Continuity

The institution maintains safeguards for learner interests, continuity, complaints, refunds, records, and closure planning.

Standard 11: Theological Identity & Mission Formation

Where applicable, the institution clearly communicates its theological or religious identity and mission formation expectations.

Standard 12: Planning, Public Accountability & Continuous Improvement

The institution plans systematically, communicates accurately, and demonstrates ongoing improvement.

6. Accreditation Process

1. Preliminary Inquiry

The institution reviews GCTEQA's eligibility requirements, standards, policies, and public disclosures.

2. Application

The institution submits the formal application and requested preliminary documentation.

3. Eligibility Review

GCTEQA determines whether the institution appears eligible to proceed.

4. Self-Study & Evidence Submission

The institution evaluates itself against applicable standards and submits supporting evidence.

5. Completeness Review

GCTEQA reviews the submission for completeness and may request additional documentation.

6. Evaluation

Qualified reviewers evaluate documentary evidence and may conduct interviews, virtual reviews, or site-based activities as appropriate.

7. Institutional Response

The institution may be asked to respond to findings, clarify evidence, or submit corrective information.

8. Accreditation Decision

The authorized decision-making body issues a decision under established policies.

9. Public Status & Continuing Compliance

Approved status is published and the institution enters the monitoring and reporting cycle.

Payment of fees, completion of a self-study, or participation in evaluation does not guarantee accreditation.

7. Evidence & Self-Study Expectations

Accreditation is evidence-based. Institutions must demonstrate how their actual systems and practices satisfy applicable standards. Narrative statements should be supported by verifiable documentation when documentation would reasonably be expected.

- Articles, certificates, registrations, exemptions, licenses, or authorizations.
- Board bylaws, governance policies, minutes, organizational charts, and conflict-of-interest materials.
- Budgets, financial statements, financial controls, tuition schedules, and sustainability plans.
- Catalogs, curricula, syllabi, learning outcomes, assessment plans, and instructional materials.
- Faculty/staff qualifications, job descriptions, evaluations, and professional-development records.
- Student handbooks, enrollment agreements, grievance procedures, refund policies, and records practices.
- Learning management system information, technology plans, privacy/security policies, and continuity procedures.
- Assessment results, institutional improvement plans, strategic plans, stakeholder feedback, and public disclosures.

8. Evaluation Methods

GCTEQA may use one or more evaluation methods depending on the institution, risk profile, and scope of review:

- Document and evidence review
- Written requests for clarification
- Leadership and governance interviews
- Faculty, staff, student, or stakeholder interviews where appropriate

- Virtual institutional review
- On-site review where necessary or required
- Technology/LMS demonstration
- Financial or compliance verification
- Follow-up review or corrective-action verification

Evaluation methods are selected to permit reasonable verification of institutional claims while respecting confidentiality, proportionality, and the institution's educational model.

9. Accreditation Decisions & Statuses

Accredited

The institution has demonstrated satisfactory compliance with applicable standards and requirements.

Accredited with Monitoring

Accreditation is granted while specified matters remain subject to reporting, monitoring, or corrective action.

Deferred

A final decision is postponed pending specified evidence, corrective action, or additional review.

Denied

The institution has not demonstrated sufficient compliance for accreditation.

Probation / Show Cause

An accredited institution has significant compliance concerns and must demonstrate why accreditation should remain in effect.

Suspended

Accreditation is temporarily restricted or placed in inactive status under applicable policy.

Withdrawn

Accreditation is ended voluntarily by the institution or involuntarily under GCTEQA policy.

GCTEQA may use additional or differently titled statuses when defined in Board-approved policy. Public status descriptions shall be accurate and current.

10. Term of Accreditation & Continuing Compliance

The accreditation term, renewal cycle, and any monitoring requirements are stated in the institution's official decision notice. Accredited status remains contingent upon ongoing compliance, required reporting, truthful public representation, and timely disclosure of material changes.

GCTEQA may shorten a term, impose monitoring, or require additional review when material compliance concerns arise.

11. Annual Reporting & Monitoring

- Annual institutional updates or compliance reports

- Current enrollment and program information
- Updates to legal authorization or regulatory status
- Material governance or ownership changes
- Financial sustainability information when requested
- Student complaints or material legal/regulatory matters
- Progress on required improvement plans
- Current public disclosures and accreditation representations

Failure to submit required reports may result in monitoring, warning, probation, suspension, or withdrawal under applicable policy.

12. Substantive Change

Accredited institutions must notify GCTEQA of material changes that could affect institutional quality, scope, legal status, governance, delivery, or compliance. Depending on the change, prior approval may be required.

- Change of ownership or control
- Change of institutional name
- Change of legal entity or legal status
- Change of primary location
- Addition of significant new programs or new degree levels
- Major expansion of online or distance delivery
- Merger, acquisition, or consolidation
- Major governance or executive leadership change
- Closure, teach-out, or material reduction of operations
- Loss or modification of required governmental authorization

13. Complaints, Appeals & Due Process

Complaints

GCTEQA maintains written procedures for complaints concerning accredited or applicant institutions when the allegations fall within GCTEQA's standards and authority. GCTEQA is not a substitute for law enforcement, courts, licensing boards, consumer-protection agencies, or other governmental authorities.

Appeals

Eligible adverse accreditation decisions may be appealed under written procedures defining grounds, deadlines, submission requirements, and decision authority. Appeals are reviewed by individuals who did not make the original adverse decision and who are free from disqualifying conflicts.

Fair Process

Institutions ordinarily receive notice of material compliance concerns and an opportunity to respond before final adverse action, subject to exceptions necessary to address fraud, immediate student harm, unlawful operation, or other urgent circumstances.

14. Conflict of Interest & Reviewer Independence

- Reviewers and decision-makers must disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts.

- Persons with disqualifying conflicts must recuse themselves from evaluation, deliberation, and voting.
- Current or recent employment, consulting, ownership, governance, close family, or significant financial relationships may create conflicts.
- Accreditation decisions may not be influenced by donations, business relationships, consulting arrangements, personal relationships, or improper considerations.
- Technical assistance or readiness support does not guarantee or predetermine accreditation.

15. Fees & Financial Integrity

Application, evaluation, annual, monitoring, substantive-change, renewal, appeal, site-review, or other fees may apply as published in GCTEQA's current fee schedule.

Fees support the cost of review, administration, evaluation, quality assurance, and related services. Fees are not payment for accreditation.

Accreditation cannot be purchased.

Unless a published policy states otherwise, institutions remain responsible for costs already incurred in connection with their review. Refund provisions, if any, are governed by the applicable fee and refund policy in effect at the time of payment.

16. Public Disclosure & Accreditation Verification

GCTEQA may publish or verify an institution's accreditation status, scope, effective date, expiration or review date, monitoring status, and other information necessary for public accountability.

- Institutions must represent their GCTEQA status accurately and without exaggeration.
- Applicant or pending status must not be represented as accredited status.
- An institution may not imply that GCTEQA provides governmental authorization, federal financial-aid eligibility, licensure eligibility, or guaranteed transferability.
- Members of the public may request verification directly from GCTEQA.

17. Use of GCTEQA Name, Seal & Marks

Only institutions holding current authorization from GCTEQA may display GCTEQA accreditation marks, seals, badges, or related status statements.

- Marks must be used in the form and context authorized by GCTEQA.
- Marks may not be altered in a misleading manner.
- Use must stop promptly when accreditation expires, is suspended, withdrawn, or otherwise ends.
- An institution may not place the GCTEQA seal on a program or credential in a way that falsely implies separate programmatic accreditation unless such status was specifically granted.

18. Sanctions, Withdrawal & Institutional Closure

When an institution fails to maintain standards or comply with required reporting, GCTEQA may impose monitoring, warning, probation, show-cause, suspension, denial of renewal, or withdrawal, as provided by policy.

Institutions planning closure should protect learners through reasonable records preservation, communication, refund or teach-out arrangements where applicable, and compliance with governing law. GCTEQA may require a closure or teach-out plan when appropriate.

19. International Institutions

GCTEQA may consider eligible institutions operating outside the United States. International applicants must demonstrate lawful organization and educational authority appropriate to their jurisdiction. GCTEQA may request certified translations, governmental verification, credential documentation, or other evidence needed to understand the institution's legal and educational context.

GCTEQA accreditation does not replace recognition, approval, registration, or authorization required by any foreign government, ministry, regulator, or professional body.

20. Records, Confidentiality & Data Protection

GCTEQA protects nonpublic institutional information consistent with law, legitimate accreditation needs, and Board-approved policies. Public accreditation status and other designated public information are not confidential.

- Institutional submissions may be shared with authorized reviewers, advisors, decision-makers, counsel, or service providers who require access for legitimate functions.
- Student personally identifiable information should be minimized and protected.
- Institutions should redact unnecessary sensitive information before submission when practical.
- GCTEQA may retain records according to its document-retention policy.
- Confidentiality does not prevent disclosures required by law, court order, regulatory obligation, or necessary protection of persons or organizational integrity.

21. Institutional Responsibilities

- Maintain lawful authority to operate and, where applicable, to grant credentials or degrees.
- Provide complete, accurate, and non-misleading information to GCTEQA.
- Notify GCTEQA of material changes and significant legal or regulatory matters.
- Represent accreditation status accurately in all public materials.
- Maintain policies, records, personnel, finances, technology, and student protections appropriate to the institution.
- Cooperate with monitoring, review, complaints, and verification processes.
- Protect student records and maintain continuity/closure plans appropriate to risk.
- Use accreditation marks only as authorized.
- Maintain a culture of continuous improvement rather than treating accreditation as a one-time event.

22. Definitions

Accreditation

A formal quality-assurance status awarded by GCTEQA after an institution demonstrates satisfactory compliance with applicable standards.

Applicant Institution

An institution that has submitted an application and is participating in the review process but has not yet been granted accreditation.

Accredited Institution

An institution currently holding accreditation in good standing or another defined active accreditation status.

Evidence

Documentation or other verifiable information used to demonstrate institutional compliance.

Monitoring

Additional reporting or review required to verify continued compliance or correction of identified concerns.

Self-Study

An institution's structured evaluation of its own performance against GCTEQA standards.

Substantive Change

A material institutional change that may affect the scope, quality, legality, governance, delivery, or compliance of the institution.

Reviewer

An authorized individual who evaluates institutional evidence or participates in an accreditation review.

Appendix A. Twelve Accreditation Standards at a Glance

Standard	Title	Primary Focus
Standard 1	Mission, Identity & Integrity	Mission alignment, integrity, identity
Standard 2	Legal Establishment & Authorization	Legal status, authorization, compliance
Standard 3	Governance, Leadership & Ethical Conduct	Governance, ethics, accountability
Standard 4	Financial Responsibility & Sustainability	Financial sustainability and controls
Standard 5	Educational Programs & Curriculum	Programs, curriculum, learning outcomes
Standard 6	Faculty, Instructional Staff & Development	Personnel qualifications and development
Standard 7	Admissions, Students & Learner Support	Admissions, records, services, learner support
Standard 8	Assessment & Educational Effectiveness	Assessment and institutional effectiveness
Standard 9	Online Learning, Technology & Information Security	Technology, online delivery, information security
Standard 10	Student Protection, Wellbeing & Continuity	Learner protection, continuity, safeguarding
Standard 11	Theological Identity & Mission Formation	Religious/theological identity where applicable
Standard 12	Planning, Public Accountability & Continuous Improvement	Planning, transparency, continuous improvement

Appendix B. Core Evidence Categories

- Corporate formation and legal authorization
- Governance and board oversight
- Ethics, conflicts, confidentiality, and accountability
- Financial sustainability and planning
- Safety, safeguarding, continuity, and learner protection
- Academic programs, curriculum, assessment, and records
- Faculty and staff qualifications and development
- Technology, information security, LMS, and online operations
- Student services, complaints, refunds, and public disclosures
- Institutional effectiveness, strategic planning, and continuous improvement

Appendix C. Institutional Readiness Checklist

☐ Institutional legal name and formation records are current.
☐ Required operating authority, exemptions, registrations, or approvals are documented.
☐ Governance structure and current leadership are documented.
☐ Bylaws, conflict-of-interest policy, and major governance policies are current.
☐ Program catalog and website accurately describe offerings and status.
☐ Faculty/staff qualifications are documented.
☐ Student records and record-retention systems are operational.
☐ Tuition, fees, refunds, and enrollment terms are transparent.
☐ Financial records and sustainability planning are available.
☐ Technology and data-protection practices are documented.
☐ Assessment results and improvement plans are available.
☐ Complaint, grievance, and appeal procedures are published.
☐ Accreditation claims are accurate and not misleading.
☐ Institution is prepared to submit evidence and participate in interviews/review.

Closing Statement

Diverse Traditions. Shared Standards. Global Excellence.

GCTEQA is committed to strengthening institutions through evidence-based quality assurance, ethical governance, learner protection, transparency, and continuous improvement.

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