GCTEQA

GLOBAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION & QUALITY ASSURANCE, INC.

ETHICAL STANDARDS & PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT CODE

2026 Public Governance & Accreditation Integrity Edition

Integrity. Independence. Fairness. Accountability.

These standards apply to GCTEQA governance, accreditation review, decision-making, public representations, records, financial stewardship, and professional conduct.

Diverse Traditions. Shared Standards. Global Excellence.

Document Control

Document Title	Ethical Standards & Professional Conduct Code
Organization	Global Commission for Theological Education & Quality Assurance, Inc. (GCTEQA)
Edition	2026 Public Governance & Accreditation Integrity Edition
Applies To	Directors, officers, employees, reviewers, evaluators, committee members, contractors, volunteers, and other persons acting for or on behalf of GCTEQA; applicable provisions also govern participating institutions.
Related Documents	Conflict of Interest Policy; Ethics, Whistleblower & Non-Retaliation Policy; Reviewer/Evaluator Handbook; Complaints & Appeals Policy; Records & Data Protection Policy; Decision & Review Policy.
Policy Owner	Board of Directors / Governance & Ethics Function
Review Cycle	At least annually and whenever material legal, governance, or accreditation-integrity requirements change.
Status	Public ethical standards; subject to formal governance oversight and periodic revision.

1. Purpose

These Ethical Standards establish the minimum conduct expected of persons who govern, administer, evaluate, review, advise, or otherwise act on behalf of GCTEQA. They are designed to protect accreditation independence, institutional fairness, learner and public interests, organizational credibility, and the integrity of GCTEQA decisions and records.

The standards supplement, and do not replace, applicable law, GCTEQA bylaws, Board-approved policies, accreditation standards, reviewer procedures, conflict-of-interest requirements, and contractual obligations.

2. Core Ethical Principles

- Integrity - act honestly, accurately, and in good faith; do not falsify, conceal, manipulate, or materially misstate information.
- Independence - protect accreditation judgment from improper financial, personal, political, institutional, religious, reputational, or other influence.
- Impartiality - apply standards consistently and base findings on documented evidence rather than favoritism, bias, prestige, friendship, hostility, or pressure.
- Accountability - accept responsibility for assigned duties, document decisions appropriately, and cooperate with authorized oversight and review.
- Confidentiality - safeguard nonpublic institutional, student, personnel, reviewer, governance, financial, and investigative information.
- Respect and Dignity - communicate professionally and treat institutions, learners, reviewers, and stakeholders fairly across diverse faith, religious, theological, cultural, and mission-driven traditions.
- Transparency - describe GCTEQA status, scope, authority, fees, processes, and decisions accurately and without deceptive claims.
- Competence - accept assignments only when reasonably qualified and seek additional expertise when the matter requires it.
- Stewardship - use GCTEQA money, systems, records, intellectual property, seals, and other assets only for legitimate authorized purposes.

- Continuous Improvement - identify control weaknesses, correct errors, learn from complaints and reviews, and improve quality-assurance practices over time.

3. Ethical Duties of Directors, Officers, Staff & Representatives

- Act in the best interests of GCTEQA and its quality-assurance mission rather than for personal gain or the benefit of a favored institution.
- Maintain appropriate separation between business development, fee collection, technical assistance, evaluation, and final accreditation decision-making.
- Protect the independence of reviewers and decision bodies; do not direct a reviewer to change a finding merely to achieve a preferred outcome.
- Disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest promptly and comply with recusal or mitigation requirements.
- Maintain accurate minutes, accreditation files, financial records, correspondence, decisions, and public status records.
- Do not knowingly issue, backdate, alter, extend, or represent accreditation status without proper authorization and supporting records.
- Use confidential information only for authorized GCTEQA purposes and never for competitive, personal, political, or commercial advantage.
- Avoid threats, retaliation, harassment, coercion, discrimination, or abusive conduct in governance or accreditation activities.

4. Ethical Standards for Reviewers & Evaluators

Reviewers and evaluators hold a special position of trust. Their work must be evidence-based, independent, respectful, and sufficiently documented to support reliable decisions.

- Complete conflict checks before accepting an assignment and disclose new conflicts that arise during the review.
- Review the complete relevant record and distinguish verified evidence from assumptions, impressions, preferences, or unsupported allegations.
- Apply the published GCTEQA standards and authorized criteria rather than personal theological, denominational, cultural, political, or educational preferences.
- Refrain from soliciting employment, consulting work, gifts, favors, donations, business opportunities, or personal benefits from an institution under review.
- Do not coach an institution to conceal deficiencies or manipulate evidence to obtain a favorable result.
- Maintain secure custody of institutional evidence, notes, interview information, and draft findings.
- Report material attempts to influence, intimidate, bribe, pressure, or improperly contact the review team.
- Write findings that are clear, factual, proportionate, and supported by the record; identify both strengths and deficiencies when relevant.
- Return or securely dispose of nonpublic materials as directed by GCTEQA records and data-protection requirements.

5. Ethical Expectations for Applicant & Accredited Institutions

Institutions participating in a GCTEQA process are expected to support an honest review environment. Application, payment, technical assistance, or participation in evaluation does not purchase or guarantee accreditation.

- Submit information and evidence that are accurate, complete, current, and not materially misleading.
- Disclose material legal, regulatory, ownership, governance, financial, program, location, delivery-method, or operational changes as required.
- Do not falsify student records, faculty credentials, financial information, board records, policies, enrollment data, program evidence, or other accreditation materials.
- Do not offer improper payments, gifts, donations, employment, favors, travel, entertainment, or benefits to influence a reviewer or decision-maker.
- Do not retaliate against students, employees, reviewers, complainants, witnesses, or others for good-faith participation in accreditation or complaint processes.

- Use GCTEQA names, seals, badges, certificates, and accreditation statements only as authorized and only while the corresponding status is valid.
- Correct materially inaccurate public claims promptly when identified by GCTEQA.

6. Conflicts of Interest, Recusal & Independence

Actual, potential, and perceived conflicts must be disclosed because trust in accreditation depends on both independence and the appearance of fair decision-making.

- A person must not participate in evaluation or decision-making when a material financial, employment, family, consulting, governance, supervisory, litigation, competitive, or other relationship could reasonably call impartiality into question.
- Prior relationships with an institution, its owners, officers, employees, or close affiliates must be disclosed even when the person believes they can remain objective.
- When a conflict is material, recusal or reassignment is preferred. When a conflict can be appropriately mitigated, the mitigation should be documented.
- A conflicted person may not select the reviewer, control the investigation, suppress evidence, draft the final decision for a disinterested body, or vote on the matter unless expressly permitted by policy after documented review.
- Conflict disclosures should be renewed periodically and whenever circumstances change.

7. Gifts, Payments, Fees & Financial Ethics

- Accreditation fees must be established and communicated separately from the merits of the accreditation decision.
- No payment, donation, sponsorship, purchase, referral, or commercial relationship may guarantee or improperly influence accreditation.
- Persons involved in an active review or decision should not accept gifts, cash, gift cards, excessive hospitality, personal travel, favors, or other items of value from the institution under review.
- Nominal courtesy items may be prohibited or restricted by separate GCTEQA policy; when in doubt, disclose and decline.
- Expense reimbursements, contracts, invoices, and financial records must be truthful, authorized, and supported by appropriate documentation.
- Related-party transactions must be disclosed and handled under conflict-of-interest procedures.

8. Confidentiality, Records & Data Protection

- Access confidential information only when necessary for assigned duties and share it only with persons who have a legitimate authorized need to know.
- Do not disclose nonpublic student, personnel, financial, legal, accreditation, complaint, investigative, or reviewer information for curiosity, gossip, advantage, or retaliation.
- Use reasonable safeguards when storing, transmitting, downloading, printing, or disposing of sensitive information.
- Preserve evidence and records when an investigation, complaint, appeal, litigation hold, regulatory inquiry, or other preservation duty is pending or reasonably anticipated.
- Do not alter, delete, destroy, conceal, fabricate, or backdate records to affect an accreditation, complaint, governance, or financial outcome.

9. Fair Treatment, Respect & Non-Discrimination

GCTEQA serves institutions across diverse faith, religious, theological, values-centered, and mission-driven traditions. Ethical review requires professional respect for institutional identity while maintaining consistent quality expectations.

- Do not penalize or favor an institution merely because of its faith tradition, denomination, theology, worship style, cultural background, institutional size, delivery model, prestige, or lack of prestige.
- Apply lawful nondiscrimination principles and reasonable accessibility practices consistent with applicable requirements and GCTEQA policy.
- Avoid harassment, humiliation, derogatory commentary, threats, stereotyping, or conduct that undermines professional review.

- Ask questions necessary to assess compliance respectfully and without attempting to compel theological conformity beyond the institution's own stated mission or applicable accreditation standard.

10. Public Statements, Accreditation Claims & Use of GCTEQA Marks

Accuracy in public representation is an ethical obligation. Institutions and GCTEQA representatives must distinguish clearly among application, eligibility screening, readiness review, quality review, accreditation, monitoring, suspension, withdrawal, and other statuses.

- No institution may represent itself as GCTEQA accredited until an authorized written accreditation decision has been issued and the status is effective.
- No person may claim or imply that GCTEQA accreditation itself constitutes governmental authorization, degree-granting authority, U.S. Department of Education or CHEA recognition, federal student-aid eligibility, professional licensure eligibility, guaranteed transfer of credit, or guaranteed credential acceptance.
- Public verification records, certificates, seals, badges, and website statements must match the institution's actual current GCTEQA status and scope.
- Expired, withdrawn, suspended, revoked, or superseded accreditation materials must not be used to create a false current-status impression.
- Errors in GCTEQA public records should be corrected promptly through authorized procedures and documented when material.

11. Reporting Ethical Concerns & Protection from Retaliation

Persons are encouraged to report suspected fraud, conflicts, accreditation manipulation, retaliation, falsified records, improper payments, confidentiality breaches, serious professional misconduct, or other ethical concerns in good faith.

- Good-faith reports may be made through the channels identified in the GCTEQA Ethics, Whistleblower & Non-Retaliation Policy or complaint procedures.
- A reporter does not need to prove misconduct before raising a concern but should provide truthful information and available supporting evidence.
- Knowingly fabricated or malicious reports are not protected as good-faith reporting.
- Retaliation against a good-faith reporter, witness, reviewer, complainant, or participant in an investigation is prohibited.
- Nothing in these standards prevents lawful reporting to emergency services, law enforcement, regulators, licensing bodies, government agencies, attorneys, or other authorities when appropriate or required.

12. Ethical Breaches, Corrective Action & Due Process

Suspected violations should be assessed under applicable GCTEQA policies using appropriate independence, confidentiality, fairness, documentation, and conflict controls. The severity of the response should reflect the seriousness, intent, recurrence, harm, and effect on accreditation integrity.

- Possible responses include guidance, training, correction of records, enhanced supervision, conflict recusal, reassignment, removal from a review or committee, contract or employment action, governance action, reconsideration of an affected accreditation decision, correction of public information, or referral to an appropriate external authority.
- An institution may be subject to additional monitoring, required corrective action, warning, show-cause review, suspension, withdrawal, or other action when supported by applicable standards and policy.
- Persons or institutions materially affected by adverse action should receive the process provided by applicable GCTEQA decision, complaint, or appeal procedures.
- No person materially implicated in an ethical concern may control the investigation or final outcome.

13. Annual Acknowledgment, Training & Review

- Directors, officers, key employees, reviewers, evaluators, and other designated personnel should receive periodic ethics, conflict-of-interest, confidentiality, and non-retaliation training appropriate to their roles.

- Designated persons should periodically acknowledge their responsibility to comply with these Ethical Standards and related policies.
- The Board or delegated governance/ethics function should review these standards at least annually and whenever material legal, governance, or accreditation-integrity requirements change.
- Revisions should be documented and communicated to affected persons and, when appropriate, to the public.

Appendix A - Ethical Standards Acknowledgment

For directors, officers, employees, reviewers, evaluators, committee members, contractors, volunteers, or other designated persons.

Full Name: _____

Role / Position: _____

Organization / Committee:

_____

Date: _____

- ☐ I have received or been given access to the GCTEQA Ethical Standards & Professional Conduct Code.
- ☐ I understand my duty to act with integrity, independence, fairness, confidentiality, and professional respect.
- ☐ I understand my continuing duty to disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest.
- ☐ I understand that accreditation decisions must be based on evidence and applicable standards rather than improper influence or payment.
- ☐ I understand that confidential information and GCTEQA records must be protected and used only for authorized purposes.
- ☐ I understand that good-faith reporting is protected from retaliation.
- ☐ I agree to report known or suspected serious ethical misconduct through appropriate channels and to cooperate honestly with authorized reviews.
- ☐ I agree to comply with applicable GCTEQA standards, policies, procedures, and authorized instructions.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Public Ethics Statement

GCTEQA is committed to ethical governance, independent accreditation judgment, evidence-based quality assurance, accurate public disclosure, responsible stewardship, confidentiality, fair treatment, and protection of good-faith reporting.

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