



Adventist  
Accrediting  
Association

# ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

**Part I:  
Philosophy,  
Purpose and Types  
of Accreditation**

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# SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

*Extracted from the Philosophy statement approved by consensus of the First International Conference of the Philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist Education (2001) and incorporated into the Working Policy of the General Conference.*

## **Aim and Mission**

Adventist education prepares students for a useful and joy-filled life, fostering friendship with God, whole-person development, Bible-based values, and selfless service in accordance with the Seventh-day Adventist mission to the world.

## **Philosophy**

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate norm for human conduct and His grace as the means of restoration.

Adventists recognize, however, that human motives, thinking, and behavior have fallen short of God's ideal. Education in its broadest sense is a means of restoring human beings to their original relationship with God. Working together, homes, schools, and churches cooperate with divine agencies in preparing learners for responsible citizenship in this world and in the world to come.

Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. Its time dimensions span eternity. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.

## **Tertiary Institutions**

Adventist institutions of higher education provide students a unique environment needed in pursuit of learning in the arts, humanities and religion, sciences, and various professions within the perspective of the Adventist philosophy of education and spiritual commitment. Adventist higher education:

1. Gives preference to careers that directly support the mission of the Church.
2. Recognizes the importance of the quest for truth in all its dimensions as it affects the total development of the individual in relation both to God and to fellow human beings.
3. Utilizes available resources such as revelation, reason, reflection, and research to discover truth and its implications for human life here and in the hereafter, while recognizing the limitations inherent in all human endeavors.

4. Leads students to develop lives of integrity based upon principles compatible with the religious, ethical, social, and service values essential to the Adventist worldview.
5. Fosters, particularly at the graduate level, the mastery, critical evaluation, discovery and dissemination of knowledge, and the nurture of wisdom in the community of Christian scholars.

Students completing the tertiary level at an Adventist institution should:

1. Have had the opportunity to commit themselves to God and therefore live a principled life in accordance with His will with a desire to experience and support the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. Exhibit proficiency in critical thinking, stewardship, creativity, appreciation of beauty and the natural environment, communication, and other forms of academic scholarship toward fulfillment of their vocations and lifelong learning.
3. Manifest social sensitivity and loving concern for the well-being of others in preparation for marriage and family life, citizenship within a diverse community, and fellowship within the community of God.

## **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ACCREDITATION: PHILOSOPHY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Responsibility for Quality Management and Accreditation**

All institutions of higher education have a responsibility to ensure that they deliver quality education. Integral to this responsibility is the need for a strong, internal, and continuous quality improvement of educational and management processes. External accreditation does not replace this expectation; however, it provides an important objective measurement of an institution's success.

The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (AAA) is the recognized accrediting body commissioned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to carry out the accrediting process for Adventist institutions of higher education around the world. It operates from the General Conference Department of Education in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA, and works in cooperation with its regional Commissions on Accreditation in the following areas of the world:

- East-Central Africa, Nairobi, Kenya
- Euro-Africa: Bern, Switzerland
- Euro-Asia: Moscow, Russia
- Inter-America: Miami, Florida, U.S.A.
- North America: Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
- Northern Asia-Pacific: Koyang-city, Kyounggi-do, Republic of Korea
- Southern Africa-Indian Ocean, Pretoria, South Africa
- South America: Brasilia, Brazil
- South Pacific, Wahroonga, New SouthWales, Australia
- Southern Asia: Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India
- Southern Asia-Pacific: Manila, Philippines
- Trans-Europe: St. Albans, Herts., England
- West-Central Africa: Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire

The major function of the AAA is to visit and consider accreditation or re-accreditation of all Seventh-day Adventist higher education institutions.

### **Philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist Accreditation**

The Adventist Accrediting Association holds to the principle that denominational accreditation is not dependent upon regional, state or national recognition requirements. International experience, however, has shown that many of the academic, professional, and ethical criteria established by the Adventist Accrediting Association coincide with those required by other professional and governmental accrediting bodies.

The Adventist Accrediting Association supports the right of each institution to pursue its educational mission under the guidance of a governing board elected by its constituency; the right of the faculty to teach, carry out, and publish research; and the right of students to learn and to develop their God-given talents. However, the exercise of these rights must not interfere with the institution's obligation to provide quality education within the context of the beliefs, mission, educational philosophy, and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### **Accreditation Objectives and Responsibilities**

In making its assessment of the institution visited, an accreditation team appointed by AAA will represent three significant groups:

1. The members of the institutional constituency (students, parents/guardians, alumni, church leaders and members, local and regional community), who want assurance regarding the quality of the programs and degrees offered, as well as the institutional congruence with the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. The other Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities worldwide, which expect assurance of credit and degree reciprocity with the educational institution being visited.
3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church at large, whose leaders and members desire assurance of the overall quality and mission effectiveness of an institution that is part of its global educational network.

This team will seek to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate, based on the *Self-Study* document and an on-site visit, the overall status of a specific Seventh-day Adventist educational institution.
2. To assess the degree to which the institution fulfills the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education in forming the character and developing the talents of young men and women who are committed to the Seventh-day Adventist message and who support the mission of the Church.
3. To determine if the degree programs offered by the institution are comparable in content and quality to those offered by similar Seventh-day Adventist and non-Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions, both in the same country and in other countries of the world.
4. To provide guidance to the administration and the institutional board on ways in which the institution may strengthen its operation and better achieve its educational and spiritual objectives and its overall mission.

## **Relation of AAA Accreditation to Government/Regional Accreditation/Approval**

It is essential that all Adventist institutions operate within the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church, clearly reflecting Adventist identity and ethos. Accreditation and governmental approval can also be important to the ongoing health and credibility of educational institutions and their financial viability. These institutions must consequently work within the requirements and parameters of the local and national policies and goals, while affirming the calling to be true to the mission of the church.

Insomuch as the reason an Adventist institution exists is to fulfill the gospel commission by building Adventist intellectual capacity for the church and society, AAA accreditation seeks to ensure that each institution continues to uphold the mission of the church in the context of high quality academic programs. This is evidenced by:

1. Institutional mission statements that harmonize with the overall mission of the Church.
2. Administration, faculty, and staff who support the beliefs, behaviors, and values of the Church.
3. Policies and procedures of the institution that uphold the mission of the Church and institution.
4. Academic and student life programs that are consistent with the mission of the church and institution.
5. Board, faculty, and students who embrace the role and function of AAA accreditation.
6. An education system that offers a comprehensive, wholistic Seventh-day Adventist education, which also contributes toward national goals and aspirations of the country in which it functions.
7. A unique Seventh-day Adventist identity and purpose that is evidenced through quality assurance mechanisms.

## **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ACCREDITATION PROCESSES AND BENEFITS**

### **The International Board of Education (IBE) and the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE)**

The Adventist Accrediting Association works in cooperation with two other boards in fulfilling its accreditation role: The International Board of Education (IBE) and the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE)

The International Board of Education (with its partner Boards of Education in each division territory) is the committee that approves new institutions (with its programs) for candidacy status. This action starts the process that leads to a first accreditation visit by the AAA. IBE also considers applications from established institutions for the addition of new programs (other than Religion or Theology), or substantive changes in existing programs (also excepting Religion and Theology). The International Board of Education has separate guidelines to identify these processes and these are available through the General Conference Department of Education. This Board recommends its actions to the Board of the Adventist Accrediting Association.

The International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) and the division Boards of Ministerial and Theological Education (BMTE) operate parallel to the IBE in relation to programs in Religion and Theology. They also respond to issues related to the hiring and endorsement of administrators and faculty in seminaries or theology departments. A separate handbook outlines the role and operating parameters of the IBMTE/BMTE and is available through the General Conference Department of Education. The IBMTE makes recommendations to the Board of AAA in relation to all new programs and in the expression of any concerns relating to the endorsement of faculty.

### **Candidacy Status and Initial Accreditation**

The first step towards accreditation for an institution is candidacy status.

A recommendation for candidacy status is made by the International Board of Education to the Adventist Accrediting Association. This happens when the International Board of Education (IBE), usually based on a visit from an IBE team, concludes that the infrastructure, proposed curriculum, and proposed faculty of the institution under consideration for candidacy are sufficient and of a quality that give confidence in the proposed institution and its programs, and that the institution meets the mission expectations of the church. At the time candidacy is given, AAA is recognizing that the institution is in a position to offer accredited programs and that the programs approved are, as far as can be ascertained, likely to be of the quality of other similar AAA accredited programs. While receiving institutions always retain the right to decide whether they will accept the credits granted by an institution in candidacy, AAA recommends that such credits be accepted for transfer.

Candidacy is normally for a two-year period and the institution is expected to initiate an application to AAA for provisional accreditation at the end of that two-year period, and no later than one year prior to the midpoint of the new program; and to apply for full accreditation early in the final year. Research degrees remain in candidacy until the first cohort of students complete their degrees with a visit to occur within six months afterwards. Accreditation for degrees in medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy are preceded by preliminary candidacy (approved prior to the admission of students), provisional candidacy achieved at the mid-point of the initial cohort, and full candidacy achieved at the beginning of the final year of the first cohort.

If an IBE visiting team does not consider that the institution requesting candidacy reaches the required standards to offer tertiary education programs, its report will identify conditions that need to be met before candidacy can be granted. Only when those conditions are met, and usually after another team visit, can the IBE recommend candidacy status to AAA.

### **Continued Accreditation Responsibility**

Once an institution has been accredited, the administration is responsible for ensuring that accreditation does not lapse. Ongoing quality and mission focus is assured by AAA through accreditation visits (the different types of visits are identified under “Types of Accreditation Visits” below). At the time of each visit, a confidential recommendation regarding re-accreditation will be made by the visiting team to the AAA Board. Accreditation will only be continued as long as an institution remains a quality Seventh-day Adventist institution.

An accredited institution is also expected to follow guidelines for the approval of new programs, according to the policies of IBE and IBMTE. The substantive change policy that outlines these expectations can be found at the end of this document.

## **Expectations of an Accreditation Visit**

During an accreditation visit, members of the evaluation committee are expected to demonstrate the best qualities of a Seventh-day Adventist educational professional. These include:

1. Professionalism in preparing for the visit (by becoming acquainted with the *Self-Study* document and the context in which the college or university operate), in fulfilling promptly assignments as member of the committee, in expressing judgment, and in all personal contacts and statements during the visit.
2. Confidentiality in reporting any sensitive information that has been entrusted to him/her both during and after the visit.
3. A constructive spirit that assesses objectively the strengths and weaknesses of an institution, program, or individual, and seeks to enhance their respective potential through careful counsel.
4. Avoidance of any unethical behavior, such as using the accreditation visit as an opportunity to recruit faculty, staff, or students for another institution.

The administration, faculty and staff of the institution facing an accreditation visit will also be expected to show their professionalism by:

1. Cooperating with the accreditation process by producing documents as requested and in a timely manner.
2. Not pursuing personal agendas with the team members.
3. Accepting the response of the team to the institution in an open and constructive manner and using the recommendations to strengthen the quality and mission of the institution.

## **Changes to Accreditation Status**

While the accreditation status voted by the AAA following an accreditation visit to a campus is normally upheld for the full period granted to the institution, the AAA can vote to change this status based on one of the following:

1. Substantial changes to the institutional operation that give the AAA grounds for concern that the institution can no longer offer programs of quality, that the institution has experienced exceptional personnel issues that have left the institution in a critically unstable situation, or that the Seventh-day Adventist focus and mission of the institution is at risk. In such cases, the AAA will approve a focused visit to the institution. The report from this visit may recommend a change of accreditation status.
2. A substantial disregard of the conditions or expectations identified in the voted action from the previous AAA visit. This could include an institution not submitting required reports after being reminded by AAA. It could also include a situation when a condition attached to the accreditation action has not been met in the time agreed or after a reasonable time has elapsed. In these cases, the AAA may vote to decrease the length of accreditation to schedule a full site visit at an earlier time, place an institution on probation, or, in particularly serious situations, revoke accreditation completely.
3. Continued refusal to comply with IBE, IBMTE, or AAA expectations. When an institution continues to disregard church policies, and after dialogue and consultation between the institution and the relevant division and General Conference departments of education, AAA may place the institution on probation, or in extreme circumstances, revoke accreditation.



## Extension of Accreditation

If an accreditation term has expired, an institution will be considered unaccredited unless a regular accreditation visit has taken place prior to the expiry date or an extension to the accreditation period has been voted by the AAA. Reasons for extensions are normally the following:

1. Political or other conditions in the country of the institution that make it difficult for a team to visit.
2. Significant recent changes in top personnel in the institution, making it difficult for the AAA team to effectively evaluate the institution's operation.
3. The timeline of government accreditations. It is usually advantageous to the institution and AAA to coordinate visits to institutions, so they do not conflict but rather complement government accreditation visits.
4. The inability of AAA to provide a team to visit the institution in the year expected.

In each of these cases an extension to accreditation will normally not exceed one year.

## Benefits of AAA Accreditation

Accreditation by AAA provides the following benefits:

1. *Demonstrates accountability to mission.* Accreditation indicates that an institution is true to Seventh-day Adventist focus, philosophy, and mission.
2. *Engenders confidence.* The accreditation status of an institution assures the constituency, students, donors, and employers that the institution meets threshold standards of quality for its curriculum, faculty, spiritual life, and student life.
3. *Promotes financial viability.* Accreditation attracts prospective students, faculty, and staff. It demonstrates the worthiness of an educational institution to receive denominational subsidies. The actual granting of subsidies is at the discretion of the institution's sponsoring organization.<sup>1</sup>
4. *Eases transfer of credits of study from one institution to another accredited by AAA.* Although accreditation is but one among several factors taken into account by receiving institutions, it is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality.
5. *Affirms that an educational institution functions as a denominational entity.* The institution is thus eligible for inclusion in the "Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook" listing of denominational organizations in compliance with the General Conference Working Policy and hence is eligible to use denominational trademarks.<sup>2</sup>
6. *Provides access to faculty development opportunities.* These include eligibility of teachers to receive denominational scholarships or bursaries if they qualify, subject to availability.
7. *Fosters health and safety.* Inspection of physical facilities and services are reviewed as part of accreditation to promote well-being and reduce risk. Accreditation is a consideration in terms of coverage under global risk management programs arranged by/through Adventist Risk Management.

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<sup>1</sup> GC Working Policy FE 20 35

<sup>2</sup> General Conference Working Policy BA 40 ("Trademark Policy")

## TYPES OF ACCREDITATION VISITS

### Regular Accreditation Visit (Form A)

Most Seventh-day Adventist higher education institutions will be visited under the terms of Form A. A regular accreditation visit will take place at least every five years. This will require the completion of an extensive *Self-Study* by the institution in twelve areas.

### Regular Accreditation Visit (Form B)

After a well-established institution has developed a strong record of delivering quality and focused Seventh-day Adventist education over an extended period, it may be considered for accreditation under the terms of Form B. This will require the completion of a *Self-Study* in seven areas. The focus will be more specifically on the mission and Seventh-day Adventist ethos of the institution.

Nominations of institutions to use Form B come from the division directors of education in cooperation with their General Conference Department of Education liaison. Approval of institutions to use Form B will be voted by AAA. In making recommendations, the directors of education will consider external and internal institutional quality indicators.

Examples of external indicators of institutional quality are:

- Accreditation (or equivalent) by recognized government or regional bodies through a process that is at least as rigorous in its demands as AAA accreditation. (Regional and government accreditation reports and updates must be regularly submitted to AAA.)
- A history of accreditation by the AAA of at least 20 years.
- The institution receiving the maximum length of accreditation from the AAA in the previous two visits.
- A track record of adhering to church educational policies.

Examples of internal indicators of institutional quality are:

- A strong, internal continuous quality improvement of educational and management processes.
- An adequate basis of financial support.
- A well-defined internal governance structure that ensures stable leadership and/or well-developed transition procedures when changes in leadership become necessary.
- A governance structure that ensures both (a) adequate constituent support of the institution and (b) appropriate monitoring of the effective operation of the institution.

Institutions which use Form B are also expected to have a high percentage of Seventh-day Adventist faculty and students (recommended as 95% Seventh-day Adventist faculty and 75% Seventh-day Adventist students) or have a statement of mission and objectives that shows the institution has a non-traditional or special purpose requiring or resulting in different percentages.

The maximum accreditation term given under Form B is five years. However, if an institution accredited under the terms of Form B undergoes a regional or government accreditation process that gives an accreditation term of longer than five years, and after a successful administrative review visit, the AAA may extend its accreditation period for up to another five years to match the government accreditation term.

### **Interim Visit**

An interim visit takes place in the middle of a voted accreditation term and is focused on the institution's response made to major recommendations highlighted during the last accreditation visit. Also, it is expected that 50% or more of other recommendations will be fulfilled or that significant progress toward fulfillment has been made by that time. The terms of the visit will have been identified by the AAA when the accreditation term from the regular visit is voted.

### **Administrative Review Visit**

An administrative review visit is only available to institutions accredited under the terms of Form B that are also accredited through a strong regional/government accreditation process which gives an accreditation term in excess of five years. The administrative review visit takes place after the initial five-year accreditation period awarded by AAA and can recommend an extended term up to that awarded by the government/region, but not normally in excess of another five years.

### **Focused Visit**

When an institution is facing a particularly difficult or challenging situation, a focused visit can take place, initiated by the institution, its board, or the AAA. See also "Changes to Accreditation Status." The details of all the visits outlined above are discussed in Part II of this accreditation handbook.