

# **TLQAA**

## **WORK PACKAGE 2: STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES**

### **SURVEY OF STANDARDS**

The TLQAA Work Package 2 on Standards and Procedures is designed to follow four steps:

1. Survey Standards and Procedures
2. Draft Standards and Procedures
3. Roundtable on Standards and Procedures
4. Standards and Procedures (final)

The survey of standards and procedures, which is the focus of this document, aims at:

1. Identifying the standards used by international organizations
2. Rendering account about their organization
3. Investigating the meaning of each of the surveyed standards, its scope and its link with other standards
4. Identifying any related condition requested by each standard
5. Drawing the major conclusions that help in drafting the first version of LQAA standards.

The first part of the survey focuses on the experience of the U.S. higher education accreditation agencies in this field. The second part of the survey will focus on the European experiences.

## **SURVEY OF STANDARDS – U.S. HE ACCREDITATION AGENCIES**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The five U.S. agencies for accreditation of higher education institutions that have been surveyed are:

1. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
2. New England Association of Schools and Colleges - Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)
3. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC)
4. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC)
5. Western Association of Schools and Colleges  
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU)

These agencies differ markedly in their presentation of standards to be applied by higher education institutions in order to obtain accreditation and/or licensure. The structure of the standards, their grouping or listing, their format, and the breadth of their content vary greatly. We have analyzed the texts to identify topics and sub-topics explored by deconstructing the conceptual framework of each agency. After identifying a long list of items, we then proceeded to group them into areas or dimensions, which explore recurrent themes or topics.

#### **A. Format of Standards**

- 1) MSCHE lists 14 standards in total, grouped into two areas: 7 standards under “Institutional Context”, and 7 under “Educational Effectiveness”. Each individual standard is expressed in one or two sentences, followed by a narrative text under the heading “Context”, which is not considered part of the actual standard but serves to provide further information on the topic of the standard, its context and values, provides guidance and definition, and connects to the “Fundamental Elements” which follow. These explain the standard by specifying the particular characteristics or elements to be used to demonstrate compliance with the standard. A section on “Optional Analysis and Evidence” is also available for each standard to provide additional examples of documentation and analysis that might be carried out by each institution.
- 2) NEASC lists 11 standards with no grouping. Each standard is related to a dimension of institutional quality, and includes a Statement of the Standard in bold type, followed by numbered paragraphs that articulate the points to be taken into consideration for fulfillment of the Standard. A final paragraph entitled Institutional Effectiveness is present for each of the eleven standards.
- 3) NCA call the standards they implement Criteria for Accreditation, and have them organized under five major headings, or standard titles. Each Criterion has three elements: (a) the Criterion

Statement, which defines the necessary attributes of the institution, and which should all be met by the institution to merit accreditation; (b) the Core Components, which provides evidence of meeting the criterion; and (c) Examples of Evidence, which illustrate the types of evidence that could be provided by the institution to address the core components.

- 4) SACS precedes the listing of standards with a section on “The Principle of Integrity” and another on “Core Requirements”. The standards, called Comprehensive Standards, set forth requirements in four area groupings” (1) institutional mission, governance, and effectiveness; (2) programs; (3) resources; and (4) institutional responsibility for Commission policies. The Standards are specific to the operations of the institution and establish the level of accomplishment that is expected of the institution.
- 5) WASC lists two general Core Commitments and 4 standards. The commitments are; 1) Core commitment to institutional capacity, and (2) Core commitment to educational effectiveness. Each of the four Standards begins with a “statement of the standard” that defines the basis for judgment and that may include sub-sections for various topics under the standard. Each sub-section includes Criteria for Review which help identify key areas for review. In some places, Guidelines are also provided as side notes, helping to interpret the Criteria for Review by providing examples of how the institution can demonstrate that it has addressed the Criteria.

Actual standard ranges from simple straightforward titles to elaborate general ones that group several topics within (see Table 1). MSCHE, NEASC, and SACS have short standard titles that clearly cover specific topics. NCA has some specific titles, like “Mission and Integrity”, and some more general ones, like “Preparing for the Future”, or “Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge”, each of which encompass several topics. WASC has general standard titles, like “Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions” or “Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement”.

NCA states that:

*“The Criteria are intentionally general so that accreditation decisions focus on the particulars of each institution, that than on trying to make it fit a preestablished mold. The widely different purposes and scopes of colleges and universities demand criteria that are broad enough to encompass diversity and support innovation, but clear enough to ensure acceptable quality” (p.5).*

## **B. Inter-relation of Standards**

Since standards represent various dimensions or elements of the quality of the institution, then it is necessary that the standards and their topics are inter-related. There might be a standard on Integrity, for example, but there might also be considerations related to integrity in several of the other standards. MSCHE has a standard entitled “Integrity” (Standard #6), but also mentions integrity in Standard #4 on Leadership and Governance: “The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity...”. SACS has a whole section dedicated to “The Principle of Integrity” at the beginning of its document on the Principles of Accreditation.

Institutional effectiveness is another topic that permeates the document contents in multi-faceted contexts. SACS has a standard on Institutional Effectiveness for example, while the standards listed in NEASC each conclude with a paragraph on institutional effectiveness.

These issues presented difficulties in extracting a summary list of standards in the USA. Another difficulty stemmed from the fact that topics or sub-topics were given different locations and priorities by each agency. The topic of governance, for example, comes under “Leadership and Governance” for MSCHE, under “Organization and Governance” for NEASC, under “Mission and Integrity” for NCA, and under “Governance and Administration” for SACS.

Therefore we proceeded by deconstructing the contents and reconstructing them into grouped themes, based on the content of the standards surveyed. The following major topics were identified:

1. Mission
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Planning
4. Organization
5. Administration
6. Governance
7. Integrity
8. Institutional evaluation/ assessment
9. Resources – Institutional
10. Resources – Library
11. Resources - Financial/fiscal
12. Resources - Physical & technological
13. Academic Programs
14. Faculty
15. Teaching & Learning
16. Students
17. Other

These 17 topics constitute our basic list of concepts or common elements that were dealt with either directly or indirectly in the documents analyzed and that represent the multifaceted components of higher education institutions. Table 2 presents a summative table matrix that maps the location of each topic in the listing of standards for each of the five related agencies.

## **B. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION BY STANDARD TOPIC**

After deconstructing and reconstructing the content covered in the reference documents, the standards were grouped under 14 topic titles. Under each are some points that were synthesized from the related content presented by the U.S accreditation agencies. Following analysis of the content and discussion of the observations made, we went back and identified what each statement content represents. In curly brackets {} next to each statement, the content is identified as showing: 1) Meaning {in blue}, 2) Condition {in green}, or 3) Link to another standard {in purple}.

### **1. Standard Topic: MISSION**

Most US accrediting agencies begin their list of standards with a standard related to the Mission of the higher education institution. Four of the five US agencies have a specific standard that includes the word “Mission” in the title: MSCHE include it under “Mission and Goals”, NEASC under “Mission and Purposes”, NCA under “Mission and Integrity”, and SACS under “Institutional Mission”. WASC refers to

something similar but under a standard entitled “Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives”.

Standards related to Mission cover the following content in general:

- Mission statement defines the purpose of the institution {Meaning}
- It indicates the target group/communities it serves {Meaning}
- Stated goals/objectives specify how the HEI will fulfill its mission and/or purposes (accomplishments) {Meaning}
- Mission reflects/articulates the institution's traditions or values {Meaning}
- Mission and goals utilized to shape HEI programs/curricula and practices on which expectations for student learning are developed, identify priorities and to evaluate its effectiveness (assessment) {Meaning}
- Institution operates with integrity to ensure fulfillment of mission. {Link to another standard}
- Mission and goals developed, understood, and recognized/approved with participation of HEI members and governing body ⇒ it is communicated to the institution's constituencies. {Condition}
- Mission stated in concise manner and appears in appropriate institutional publications. {Condition}
- Mission statement is current and comprehensive. {Condition}
- HEI periodically re-evaluates content and pertinence of mission and purposes and their usefulness in providing direction in planning and resource allocation ⇒ used to enhance institutional effectiveness. {Condition}

*Note 1: Usually all other standards/components of the institution are related directly and indirectly to the mission. {Link to another standard}*

*Note 2: The mission may be accompanied by related statements, such as a statement of institutional philosophy.*

## 2. Standard Topic: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Only two of the US agencies have a standard that is related to Goals and Objectives as such. MSCHE include it under the standard entitled "Mission and Goals". WASC mention it under the standard related to Institutional Purposes: "Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives".

- Institution has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher education community, and its relationship to society at large. {Condition, Meaning}

- Through its purposes and objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. {Meaning}
- Institution establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. {Link to another standard }

*Note: Goals and objectives look like an extension of the mission, for mission is about goals and objectives; the latter are about values, purposes and character. {Link to another standard}*

### 3. Standard Topic: PLANNING

All five US agencies have a topic related to the subject of Planning in their listing of standards. MSCHE include it under Standard #2: “Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal”; NEASC under Standard #2: “Planning and Evaluation”; NCA under Criterion #2: “Preparing for the Future”; SACS under Institutional Effectiveness under the general title “Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness”; and WASC under Strategic Thinking and Planning under Standard #4: “Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement”.

- Ongoing strategic planning that involves realistic analysis of internal and external opportunities and constraints. {Meaning}
- Plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve objectives. {Meaning}
- All levels of planning align with the institution’s mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission. {Link to another standard}
- Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities. {Link to another standard}
- Institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts. {Link to another standard}
- Developing objectives to meet mission and goals. {Link to another standard}
- Utilizing results of assessment for institutional renewal. {Link to another standard}
- Institution realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic needs. {Link to another standard}
- Institutional renewal {Link to another standard}
- Planning is systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to institution. {Condition}
- Planning involves participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. {Condition}
- Results of planning regularly communicated to appropriate constituencies. {Condition}
- Implementation and evaluation of success of strategic plan. {Condition}

- Institutional research is sufficient to support planning. {Condition}
- Institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning effort and to enhance institutional effectiveness. {Condition}
- Institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning. {Condition}

#### 4. Standard Topic: ORGANIZATION

Two US agencies mention the topic of Organization: NEASC under Standard #3: “Organization and Governance” and WASC under Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes under Standard #3: “Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability”

- Through its organizational design, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and research and creative activity. {Meaning}
- Authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff are clearly described in the institution’s by-laws and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. {Meaning}
- The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles. {Meaning}
- Institution assures provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component. {Condition}
- The institution’s organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear {Condition} and consistent with its **mission** and support institutional effectiveness. {Link to another standard}

#### 5. Standard Topic: ADMINISTRATION

MSCHE include it under Standard #5: “Administration”; SACS under Standard #2: “Governance and Administration”

- Administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support institution’s organization and governance. {Link to another standard}

*Note: More details available in the SACS document on the following topics:*

- o *Organizational structure*
- o *Qualified administrative/academic officers*
- o *Personnel appointment*
- o *Administrative staff evaluations*

- *Control of intercollegiate athletics*
- *Fund-raising activities*

## 6. Standard Topic: GOVERNANCE

MSCHE include it under Standard #4: “Leadership and Governance”; NEASC under Standard #3: “Organization and Governance”; SACS under Standard #2: “Governance and Administration”

- System of governance clearly defines roles of constituencies in policy development and decision-making. {Meaning}
- Governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development. {Meaning}
- Institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. {Meaning}
- Through its governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and where appropriate research and creative activity. {Meaning}

*Note 1: More details available on governance in the NEASC document page 5*

*Note 2: More details in SACS document on following topics:*

- *CEO Evaluation/Selection*
- *Governing board control*
- *Board conflict of interest*
- *External influence*
- *Board dismissal*
- *Board/Administration distinction*

## 7. Standard Topic: INTEGRITY

MSCHE include it under Standard #6: “Integrity”; NEASC Standard #11: “Integrity”; NCA under “Mission and Integrity”; WASC mention it under the Standard #1: “Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives”.

- The institution upholds and protects its integrity. {Meaning}
- Institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies in the management of its affairs and in all of its dealings with students, prospective students, faculty staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. {Meaning}

- Institution provides support for academic and intellectual freedom. {Meaning}
- The institution functions with integrity and autonomy. {Meaning}
- Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements. {Link to another standard}

## 8. Standard Topic: INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT

MSCHE include it under Standard #7: “Institutional Assessment”; NEASC under Standard #2: “Planning and Evaluation”; NCA under Criterion #2: “Preparing for the Future”; SACS under Standard #3: “Institutional Effectiveness”

- Institution has developed and implemented an assessment process to evaluate overall effectiveness in {Meaning}:
  - o Achieving its mission and goals
  - o Its compliance with accreditation standards
- Evaluation is systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. {Condition}
- Evaluation involves the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. {Condition}
- Results of evaluation regularly communicated to appropriate constituencies. {Condition}
- Institution allocates sufficient resources for its evaluation efforts. {Condition}
- Institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its **mission** and purposes, focusing on realization of educational objectives. {Condition}
- System of evaluation designed to provide relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement. {Meaning}
- Evaluation efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods. {Meaning}
- Institution has a system of periodic review of academic and other programs that includes the use of external perspectives. {Meaning}
- Institution’s ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement. {Meaning}
- Institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in {Meaning}:
  - o Educational programs, including learning outcomes
  - o Administrative support services

- Academic and student support services
- Research within its **mission**
- Community/public service within its **mission**

## 9. Standard Topic: RESOURCES - INSTITUTIONAL

MSCHE include it under Standard #3: “Institutional Resources”; NCA under Criterion #2: “Preparing for the Future”

### Resource Allocation

- Resource base supports educational programs {Meaning}
- Resources include: human, financial, technical, facilities, and other necessary {Meaning} to achieve institution’s mission and goals. {Link to another standard}
- Resources are available and accessible. {Meaning}
- Effective and efficient use of institution’s resources analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment. {Condition}
- Institution prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends. {Condition}

## 10. Standard Topic: RESOURCES – LIBRARY

NEASC under Standard #7: “Library and Other Information Resources”; SACS Standard #8: “Library and Other Learning Resources”; WASC Standard #3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability”

- Institution provides sufficient and appropriate library and information resources. {Meaning}
- Institution provides adequate access to these resources and {Meaning} demonstrates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. {Link to another standard}
- Institution provides instructional and information technology sufficient to support its teaching and learning environment. {Meaning}

## 11. Standard Topic: RESOURCES – FINANCIAL/FISCAL

NEASC under Standard #9: “Financial Resources”; SACS under Standard #10: “Financial Resources”; WASC Standard #3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability”

- Institution’s financial resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement now and in the future. {Meaning}

- Institution demonstrates, through verifiable internal and external evidence, its financial capacity to graduate its entering class. [{Meaning}](#)
- Institution administers its financial resources with integrity. [{Meaning}](#)
- SACS topics:
  - o Financial stability
  - o Financial aid audits
  - o Control of finances
  - o Control of sponsored research/external funds

## 12. Standard Topic: RESOURCES – PHYSICAL & TECHNOLOGICAL

NEASC under Standard #8: “Physical and Technological Resources”; SACS under Standard #11: “Physical Resources”; WASC Standard #3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability”

- Institution has sufficient and appropriate physical and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes. {Meaning}
- Institution manages and maintains these resources in a manner to sustain and enhance the realization of institutional purposes. {Meaning}
- Institution provides a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community. {Meaning}

## 13. Standard Topic: ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

MSCHE includes it under Standard #11: “Educational Offerings” and Standard #12: “General Education”; NEASC includes it under Standard #4: “The Academic Program”; SACS under three standards: Standard #4: “All Educational Programs”, Standard #5: “Undergraduate Programs”, Standard #6: “Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs”

- Educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to mission. {Meaning}
- Institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings. {Meaning}
- Curricula designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in {Meaning}:
  - o General education
  - o Essential skills: oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.
- Academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill mission and purposes. {Link to another standard}
- Institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded. {Condition}
- Institution sets a standard of student achievement appropriate to the degree awarded and develops means to understand how and what students are learning and to use the evidence obtained to improve the academic program. {Condition}
- SACS have several topics:

- Academic program approval
- Program/curricular requirements
- Continuing education/service programs
- Admission and academic policies
- Acceptance of academic credit
- Practices for awarding credit
- Consortial relationships/contractual agreements
- Academic support services
- Technology use

#### 14. Standard Topic: **FACULTY**

MSCHE includes it under Standard #10: “Faculty”; NEASC under Standard #5: Faculty; NCA under Criterion #3: “Student Learning and Effective Teaching”; SACS Standard #7: “Faculty”; WASC Standard #3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability”

- Institution’s instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored and supported by qualified professionals. [{Meaning}](#)
- Faculty competency offer the institution’s academic programs and fulfill those tasks appropriately assigned them. [{Meaning}](#)
- Institution values and supports effective teaching. [{Meaning}](#)
- Institution develops a faculty that is suited to the fulfillment of the mission. [{Link to another standard}](#)
- Faculty qualifications, numbers, and performance are sufficient to accomplish the institution’s mission and purposes. [{Link to another standard}](#)
- Institution’s learning resources support effective teaching. [{Link to another standard}](#)
- SACS topics:
  - Faculty evaluation
  - Faculty development
  - Academic freedom
  - Faculty role in governance

#### 15. Standard Topic: **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

NCA under Criterion #3: “Student Learning and Effective Teaching” and Criterion #4: “Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge”; WASC Standard #2: “Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions”

- Institution provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission. {Meaning}
- The institution promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission: {Meaning}
  - o Values a life of learning
  - o Acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills
  - o Exercise of intellectual integrity
  - o Assesses usefulness of curricula to students living and working in a global, diverse, and technological society
  - o Provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

### Assessment of Student Learning

MSCHE includes it under Standard #14: “Assessment of Student Learning”; NEASC under Standard #2: “Planning and Evaluation”

- Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation or other appropriate points: {Meaning}
  - o Students have knowledge, skills and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.
- Institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and resource allocation and to inform the public about the institution. {Meaning}
- Institution’s goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible. {Condition}
- Institution creates effective learning environments. {Meaning}
- Institution’s learning resources support student learning. {Link to another standard}

## 16. Standard Topic: STUDENTS

MSCHE includes it under Standard #8: “Student Admissions and Retention” and Standard #9: “Student Support Services”; SACS under Standard #9: “Student Affairs and Services”; WASC Standard #2: “Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions”

▪ **Student Admissions and Retention:**

- Admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities congruent with institution's mission. {Meaning}
- Institution seeks to retain students through the pursuit of the students' educational goals. {Meaning}
- Consistent with its mission, the institution defines the characteristics of the students it seeks to serve and provides an environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students. {Meaning}
- Institution recruits, admits, enrolls, and endeavors to ensure the success of its students, offering the resources and services that provide them the opportunity to achieve the goals of their program as specified in institutional publications. {Meaning}
- The institution's interactions with students and prospective students are characterized by integrity. {Meaning}

▪ **Student Support Services:**

- Institution provides student support services necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students

▪ **Scholarship and Creative Activity**

**17. Standard Topic: OTHER**

A few standards remained behind after the general grouping was done, and these are the following:

MSCHE Standard #13: "**Related Educational Activities**" {these include basic skills or developmental courses, certificate programs, experiential learning, non-credit offerings, distance education}

- Institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

NEASC Standard #10: "**Public Disclosure**"

- In presenting itself to students, prospective students, and other public members, the institution provides information that is complete, accurate, timely, accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions about the institution.

NCA Criterion #5: "**Engagement and Service**"

- Institution learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- Institution has capacity and commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities

SACS Standard #12: “**Substantive Change Procedures and Policy**”

SACS Standard #13: “**Compliance with Other Commission Policies**”

SACS Standard #14: “**Representation of Status**”

## **C. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Grouping of Standards**

Investigating the standards of US accrediting agencies shows that standards could be grouped into few very broad 4 categories or into a more detailed list of fourteen items. Yet, in both cases, standards are about a long list of topics. These refer either to the components of any higher education institution or to conceptual approaches of the quality of higher education.

The list of topics covering the components is long, and these topics are found directly in the standards’ titles or disseminated in the body texts. The list includes the following:

1. Mission
2. Goals, Objectives, and purposes
3. Planning
4. Organization, Decision-Making Processes
5. Administration
6. Governance, board
7. Evaluation/ assessment-institutional
8. Evaluation/ assessment-students
9. Resources- Institutional, Resource Allocation
10. Resources – Library
11. Resources - Financial/fiscal
12. Resources - Physical & technological
13. Academic Programs (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate)
14. Faculty (profile, evaluation, development),
15. Staff, personnel
16. Teaching & Learning
17. Students-achievement
18. Students-Admission and retention
19. Students- Support services
20. Students- financial aid
21. Fund-raising activities

## 22. Distance learning

Surprisingly **research** is not found in any of accrediting agencies standards in the USA. Also **community service** is not highlighted in most of them, with the exception of NCA. Worthy to note as well is the fact that the surveyed standards do not request the existence of a **quality assurance structure** in the institution itself. Instead, the institutional assessment is highlighted since it may play a similar role of that of quality assurance structure in European models.

As for the conceptual approaches, they are sometimes highlighted as specific standards and sometimes are found in the folds of the text, as bottom line criteria. Every accrediting agency has its own approach(es) and focus. The total list extracted is as follows:

1. Integrity
2. Effectiveness
3. Sustainability
4. Leadership
5. Public disclosure
6. Engagement
7. Institutional Renewal
8. Preparing for the Future
9. Autonomy
10. Accountability
11. Ethics
12. Intellectual/academic freedom
13. Participation
14. Partnership
15. Other

Put together, these two lists of standards and their related concepts raise the number of topics that could be taken into consideration to more than 36 topics. Again any given number is, for each accrediting agency, the result of an art of grouping and of a philosophy of higher education, tailored for its own style and to meet its own needs. No single standard is found replicated or duplicated as such in the five American accrediting agencies (see Table 2 below). This does not mean that students are totally absent in NCA standards, nor that mission is totally absent from WASC standards, etc., but rather that the terminology or format used is different.

## **B. Elements of Standards**

The second major observation related to US standards is that each standard statement, in all five agencies, includes usually three major elements: (1) the meaning, (2) the conditions, and (3) the links with other standards.

Meaning defines the scope of the term expressing the standard. The standard on Planning, for instance, “involves realistic analysis of internal and external opportunities and constraints” and “planning for and responding to financial and other contingencies, establishing feasible priorities, and developing a realistic course of action to achieve objectives”.

Condition(s) refer to the state in which things ought to be or to the form they ought to take. For example the mission statement of the institution should be: stated in concise manner and appears in appropriate institutional publication, current and comprehensive, etc. Planning, on the other hand, should be systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to institution. It should involve participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes, and results of planning are regularly communicated to appropriate constituencies, etc.

Link(s) to other standards refer to the specific interdependencies of the standards, and reflect their integrality. These are few examples (standards' titles are in bold): **Institutional decision-making**, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with **planning** priorities; the institution's **organizational structure**, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its **mission** and support institutional **effectiveness**; **administrative structure** and services facilitate **learning** and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support **institution's organization** and **governance**. Mission is the most frequent standard that other standards are referred or linked to.

The topics analyzed present several considerations to be determined for the Lebanese context. With the diversity of the higher institutions in Lebanon in mind, and the public versus private sector implications on administration, governance, student enrolment, and fields of study, the following questions need be answered in order to develop our own framework for accreditation:

- Is the list of elements exhaustive and does it cover all topics necessary for the Lebanese HEIs?
- Are the topics of the same importance/priority in the Lebanese context?
- Since the Lebanese HEIs have different models, would it be easier to state fewer standards with more general titles or a longer list of standards with more specific titles?

Table 1. Listing of Headings and Standards by U.S. Accrediting Agency

Agency	Terminology	Pub. & date	Areas / Headings	Criteria/Standards
1. MSCHE	Standards for Accreditation	✓ (68p) 2006	14 total; standards listed under 2 areas	<p><b><i>Institutional Context</i></b>            Standard 1: Mission and Goals            Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal            Standard 3: Institutional Resources            Standard 4: Leadership and Governance            Standard 5: Administration            Standard 6: Integrity            Standard 7: Institutional Assessment</p> <p><b><i>Educational Effectiveness</i></b>            Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention            Standard 9: Student Support Services            Standard 10: Faculty            Standard 11: Educational Offerings            Standard 12: General Education            Standard 13: Related Educational Activities            Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning</p>
2. NEASC	Standards for Accreditation	✓ (27p) Adopted 2005, last revision 2011	11 total; no grouping; standards just listed	<p>Standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Mission and Purposes</li> <li>2) Planning and Evaluation</li> <li>3) Organization and Governance</li> <li>4) The Academic Program</li> <li>5) Faculty</li> <li>6) Students</li> <li>7) Library and Other Information Resources</li> <li>8) Physical and Technological Resources</li> <li>9) Financial Resources</li> <li>10) Public Disclosure</li> <li>11) Integrity</li> </ol>

Agency	Terminology	Pub. & date	Areas / Headings	Criteria/Standards
<b>3. NCA</b>	The Criteria for Accreditation	✓(15p) 2010	5 general headings, 21 core components, each with examples of evidence	Criteria: 1) Mission and Integrity 2) Preparing for the Future 3) Student Learning and Effective Teaching 4) Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge 5) Engagement and Service
<b>4. SACS</b>	The Comprehensive Standards	✓ (44p) Approved 2001, last revision 2011	4 general areas, 14 standards, 58 statements	Standards: 1) Institutional Mission 2) Governance and Administration 3) Institutional Effectiveness 4) All Educational Programs 5) Undergraduate Educational Programs 6) Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs 7) Faculty 8) Library and Other Learning Resources 9) Student Affairs and Services 10) Financial Resources 11) Physical Resources 12) Responsibility for compliance with the Commission's substantive change procedures and policy 13) Responsibility for compliance with other Commission policies 14) Representation of status with the Commission
<b>5. WASC</b>	The Core Commitments and Standards for Accreditation	✓ (25p) 2008	2 core commitments, 4 general standards with 10 sub- categories, 42 criteria for review and guidelines	Core Commitments: 1) Institutional Capacity 2) Educational Effectiveness Standards: 1) Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives 2) Achieving educational objectives through core functions 3) Developing and applying resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability 4) Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement

TABLE 2. STANDARDS MAPPING MATRIX BY U.S. AGENCY

#	Standard	Accrediting Agencies				
		MSCHE	NEASC	NCA	SACS	WASC
1.	<b>Mission</b>	✓ S1: Mission and Goals, under “Institutional Context”	✓ S1: Mission and Purposes	✓ C1: Mission and Integrity	✓ S1: Institutional Mission under “Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness”	
2.	<b>Goals and Objectives</b>	✓ S1: Mission and Goals, under “Institutional Context”				✓ Institutional Purposes under S1: “Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives”
3.	<b>Planning</b>	✓ S2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal, under “Institutional Context”	✓ S2: Planning and Evaluation	✓ C2: Preparing for the Future	✓ S3: Institutional Effectiveness under “Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness”	✓ Strategic Thinking and Planning under S4: “Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement”
4.	<b>Organization</b>		✓ S3: Organization and Governance			✓ Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes under S3: “Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability”
5.	<b>Administration</b>	✓ S5: Administration under “Institutional Context”			✓ S2: Governance and Administration under “Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness”	
6.	<b>Governance</b>	✓ S4: Leadership and Governance under “Institutional Context”	✓ S3: Organization and Governance	✓ C1: Mission and Integrity	✓ S2: Governance and Administration under “Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness”	
7.	<b>Integrity</b>	✓ S6: Integrity under “Institutional Context”	✓ S11: Integrity	✓ C1: Mission and Integrity		✓ Integrity under S1: “Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives”
8.	<b>Institutional</b>	✓ S7: Institutional	✓ S2: Planning and	✓ C2: Preparing for the	✓ S3: Institutional	

#	Standard	Accrediting Agencies				
		MSCHE	NEASC	NCA	SACS	WASC
	<b>evaluation/assessment</b>	Assessment under "Institutional Context"	Evaluation	Future	Effectiveness under "Institutional Mission, Governance and Effectiveness"	
9.	<b>Resources-Institutional</b>	✓ S3: Institutional Resources, under "Institutional Context"		✓ C2: Preparing for the Future		
	<b>a. Resources-Library</b>		✓ S7: Library and Other Information Resources		✓ S8: Library and Other Learning Resources under "Programs"	✓ Fiscal, Physical and Information Resources under S3: "Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability"
	<b>b. Resources-financial / fiscal</b>		✓ S9: Financial Resources		✓ S10: Financial Resources under "Resources"	✓ Fiscal, Physical and Information Resources under S3: "Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability"
	<b>c. Resources-physical &amp; technological</b>		✓ S8: Physical and Technological Resources		✓ S11: Physical Resources under "Resources"	✓ Fiscal, Physical and Information Resources under S3: "Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability"
10.	<b>Academic Programs</b>	✓ S11: Educational Offerings under "Educational Effectiveness" ✓ S12: General Education under "Educational Effectiveness"	✓ S4: The Academic Program		✓ S4: All Educational Programs; ✓ S5: Undergraduate Educational Programs; ✓ S6: Graduate and Post-Baccalaureate Professional Programs all under "Programs"	✓ Teaching and Learning under S2: "Achieving educational objectives through core functions" ✓ Support for Student Learning and Success under S2: "Achieving educational objectives through core functions"
11.	<b>Faculty</b>	✓ S10: Faculty under "Educational Effectiveness"	✓ S5: Faculty		✓ S7: Faculty under "Programs"	✓ Teaching and Learning under S2: "Achieving educational objectives through core functions" ✓ Faculty and Staff under S3:

#	Standard	Accrediting Agencies				
		MSCHE	NEASC	NCA	SACS	WASC
						“Developing and Applying Resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability”
12.	Teaching & Learning			✓ C3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching		✓ Teaching and Learning under S2: “Achieving educational objectives through core functions”
13.	Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ S8: Student Admissions and Retention under “Educational Effectiveness”</li> <li>✓ S9: Student Support Services under “Educational Effectiveness”</li> <li>✓ S14: Assessment of Student Learning under “Educational Effectiveness”</li> </ul>	✓ S6: Students		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ S9: Student Affairs and Services under “Programs”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teaching and Learning ;</li> <li>✓ Support for Student Learning and Success both under S2: “Achieving educational objectives through core functions”</li> <li>✓ Scholarship and Creative Activity under S2: “Achieving educational objectives through core functions”</li> </ul>
14.	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ S13: Related Educational Activities under “Educational Effectiveness”</li> </ul>	✓ S10: Public Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ C4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge</li> <li>✓ C5: Engagement and Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ S12: Responsibility for compliance with the Commission’s substantive change procedures; and</li> <li>✓ S13: Responsibility for compliance with other Commission policies and policy; and</li> <li>✓ S14: Representation of status with the Commission under “Institutional Responsibility for Commission Policies”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Commitment to Learning and Improvement under S4: “Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement”</li> </ul>