



**AALE**

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**American Academy for Liberal Education**

**Program Standards  
of  
Excellence in Liberal Education**

American Academy for Liberal Education  
Washington, DC 20016  
[www.aale.org](http://www.aale.org)

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## Introduction

The **American Academy for Liberal Education** (AALE) is a specialized accreditor with standards designed for programmatic accreditation of post-secondary U.S. and international liberal arts core curricula, general education and specific liberal arts programs through the master's level. The *AALE Program Standards of Excellence in Liberal Education* is the basis for the accreditation review process.

The *AALE Program Standards* are designed to support and recognize excellence in liberal arts learning and teaching. They are intended to establish that applicants and accredited members take seriously their liberal arts mission and engage in both qualitative and quantitative educational assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning processes. The *AALE Program Standards* allow for recognition of the diverse ways the ends and means of quality liberal education can be achieved.

Accreditation by the American Academy for Liberal Education signifies programmatic integrity and a strong commitment to liberal education. It provides interested parties - including parents and prospective students - a means of distinguishing well-articulated post-secondary core curricula, general education and specific liberal arts programs.

## **Development of the *Program Standards of Excellence in Liberal Education***

The AALE *Program Standards of Excellence in Liberal Education* is the result of an extensive revision of the long-standing AALE *Institutional Standards for Accreditation* conducted under the direction of the AALE Council of Scholars. With the assistance of commentary from accredited members, trained site visitors, and liberal arts faculty and administrators at-large, the *Program Standards of Excellence in Liberal Education* was finalized and approved by the AALE Board of Trustees in October 2013. To ensure that AALE maintains accreditation standards that best support and recognize excellence in liberal education, the *Program Standards* are subject to a regular cycle of review (see: Standards Review at [www.aale.org](http://www.aale.org)).

## **Structure of the *Program Standards of Excellence in Liberal Education***

Standards 1-4: *Mission; Learning Objectives and Assessment; Curriculum; and Faculty and Teaching* are designed to ensure that the cornerstones of the liberal arts program focus clearly and coherently on providing students with the highest quality liberal education.

Standards 5-8: *Administration and Finance; Educational Resources; Student Support Services; and Admissions, Records and Publications* are designed to ensure that a program has the administrative structure, educational and financial resources, and student support services necessary to support its mission and maintain the integrity and quality of the program.

Each standard is followed by criteria that are used during the peer-review evaluation and the final decision process to determine if the Standard has been met.

## PROGRAM STANDARDS of EXCELLENCE in LIBERAL EDUCATION

### STANDARD 1: Mission

The program publishes a mission statement that articulates the program's learning objectives and emphasizes the importance of liberal education: *introducing students to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and for the good it brings to self and society, cultivating thoughtful and responsible persons and citizens, and preparing students for productive engagement in the world.*

#### CRITERIA

1.a The program's mission statement emphasizes liberal education and articulates well-defined learning objectives that are appropriate for liberal education.

1.b The program's mission statement is approved through the appropriate governance procedure and is supported by the program's faculty, administrators and students.

1.c The program's mission statement is regularly reviewed through the appropriate governance procedure that includes faculty review to ensure that the program's integrity and its commitment to the importance of liberal education are maintained.

1.d The program publishes its mission statement in a way that makes it easily accessible to the program's students, prospective students, and the interested public.

1.e The program's mission statement is supported by a clear, published policy defining its commitment to the liberty of thought and speech consistent with the habits of rigorous inquiry and civil discourse and in conformity with applicable law. Any limitation of this liberty must be clearly specified, published, and appropriately disseminated.

### STANDARD 2: Learning Objectives and Assessment

The program regularly assesses student achievement of its learning objectives, including (a) the ability to reason and communicate effectively, (b) possession of broad and integrated knowledge of liberal arts, and (c) an inclination to inquire, and provides evidence that it uses the results to maintain areas of strength and to address areas requiring improvement in liberal learning.

## CRITERIA

2.a The program demonstrates through appropriate means of assessment the student's ability to reason and communicate effectively through attainment of foundational abilities including fluency in reading, writing, oral communication and mastery of basic principles of logic, including deductive and inductive reasoning.

2.b The program demonstrates through appropriate means of assessment the student's possession of a broad and integrated knowledge of liberal arts through familiarity with the essential knowledge, principles and methods proper to the various subject areas or disciplines represented in the program's requirements and an ability to relate these different subject areas or disciplines to one another in cogent and significant ways.

2.c The program demonstrates through appropriate means of assessment the student's inclination to inquire as evidenced through a disposition for asking incisive and insightful questions; assessing accurately one's own knowledge, abilities and performance; and pursuing enriching and useful knowledge and skills both in and beyond the classroom.

2.d The program demonstrates that it uses its assessment results to maintain areas of strength and to address areas needing improvement in fostering liberal learning in students.

### **STANDARD 3: Curriculum**

The program curriculum aligns with the program's learning objectives and acquaints students in rigorous and substantial ways with broad and integrated knowledge of liberal arts.

## CRITERIA

3.a. The program ensures study in the following areas: literature and literary classics; mathematics and/or formal logic; physical and/or life sciences; foreign language, classical or modern; history; and the foundations and principles of Western Civilization as well as American society. [Alternative models for addressing these areas and which demonstrate excellence of the curriculum as a whole and assure substantial fulfillment of Standard 3 are acceptable for review. Programs outside the U.S. may replace areas of study specific to Western civilization and the U.S. with areas applicable to the applicant's country.]

3.b The program requires one or more courses or projects in which the student engages a substantive integrative question using one or more of the following areas: literature and literary classics; mathematics and/or logic; physical and/or life sciences; foreign language, classical or modern; history; and the foundations and principles of Western Civilization as well as American society. [Alternative models for addressing these areas and which demonstrate excellence of the curriculum as a whole and assure substantial fulfillment of Standard 3 are acceptable for review. Programs outside the U.S. may replace areas of study specific to Western civilization and the U.S. with areas applicable to the applicant's country.]

3.c The program requires students to write substantial essays at each stage of the program to promote effective reasoning, fluency in written English, broad knowledge of liberal arts, and an inclination to inquire. [Languages other than English are acceptable for programs located outside of the U.S. and where another language is most common.]

3.d The program clearly defines academic requirements for admission to the program, enrollment in the program's courses, and completion of the program.

3.e The program aligns each course of the program's curriculum with one or more of the program's learning objectives.

3.f The program requires faculty to evaluate student achievement in a manner appropriate to the learning objectives for each course within the curriculum.

3.g The program maintains a policy on the use of distance education and correspondence education courses to meet program requirements that is consistent with its learning objectives and meets all requirements of the institution's policy on distance education and correspondence education at which the program is offered.

3.h The program clearly defines the prerequisite structure for orderly progression from introductory-level to higher-level courses within the program. [Degree programs only]

3.i The program requirements for a non-research master's degree in a commonly-recognized liberal arts discipline or in an integrated liberal arts program promote writing and discourse at a post-baccalaureate level. [Graduate programs only]

#### **STANDARD 4: Faculty and Teaching**

The program promotes the importance of teaching and the use of instructional practices suitable to liberal education.

## CRITERIA

- 4.a The program recognizes its faculty as the body principally responsible for implementing the program's curriculum.
- 4.b The program's faculty members are qualified through experience and/or education at the appropriate advanced degree level for their teaching assignments.
- 4.c The program's faculty includes full-time and senior members who are engaged in both teaching and student advising.
- 4.d The program ensures that class sizes are appropriate to subject matter, are consistent with the program's learning objectives, and support instructional practices suitable to liberal education.
- 4.e The program, through the institution at which the program is offered, observes regular published procedures for recruitment, appointment, evaluation and promotion for all full-time and part-time faculty, which procedures recognize excellence in teaching and, where appropriate, scholarship.
- 4.f The program, through the institution at which the program is offered, maintains documentation of academic credentials including official transcripts showing degrees awarded for all full-time and part-time faculty, and publishes accurately the academic credentials of its faculty.
- 4.g The program defines, supports and encourages appropriate professional development activities for faculty.

## **STANDARD 5: Administration and Finance**

The program has the administrative support, fiscal resources, and financial planning processes necessary to fulfill its mission and maintain and strengthen the program.

## CRITERIA

- 5.a The program has a clearly defined administrative structure operating within the established governance system of the institution at which the program is offered. It is staffed by qualified individuals and effective in supporting the program's mission and the mission of the institution at which the program is offered.
- 5.b The program has a chief administrator whose teaching and professional experience is commensurate with the responsibilities of administering the program, evaluating program faculty, and managing and engaging in short- and long-term planning to maintain and strengthen the program.



5.c The program's chief administrator ensures that policies and procedures relating to the program are current, accessible to all who are affected by them, reviewed regularly, and implemented in a timely and ethical manner.

5.d The program maintains current job descriptions for administrative and support positions related to the program that clearly define duties and responsibilities.

5.e The program's informational materials are truthful, accurate, and current with regard to the names and credentials of program administrators and governing officials of the institution at which the program is offered.

5.f The program has sufficient financial resources to support its activities and mission.

5.g The program prepares an annual budget that allocates resources in accordance with the program's long-range plan and is included in the budget planning process of the institution at which the program is offered.

5.h The program routinely monitors actual revenue and expenses to budgeted activity and makes adjustments as necessary.

5.i The program engages in a practice of long-range planning to enhance its capacity to fulfill its mission and maintain and strengthen the program.

#### **STANDARD 6: Educational Resources**

The program has access to the facilities, library and informational resources, and technological and laboratory equipment that support the achievement of its learning objectives.

#### CRITERIA

6.a The program provides students and faculty with instructional and advising spaces conducive to inquiry, discussion, and liberal learning.

6.b The program has access to the library and informational resources and technological and laboratory equipment that support the achievement of its learning objectives.

6.c The program regularly reviews the adequacy of instructional and support facilities, library and informational resources, and technological and laboratory equipment in an effort to maintain and strengthen the program.

## **STANDARD 7: Student Support Services**

The program provides student support services consistent with and adequate to achieving its mission and supports the student complaint policy of the institution at which the program is offered.

### CRITERIA

7.a The program informs students of its policies regarding enrollment in the program and registration for courses within the program.

7.b The program provides academic counseling as appropriate to meeting its mission.

7.c The program's students have access to career and post-graduate information and advising, and placement services as appropriate to its mission.

7.d The program provides extra-curricular activities appropriate to meeting its mission.

7.e The program meets its responsibilities for general student services as required by the institution at which the program is offered.

7.f The program follows the student complaint policy of the institution at which the program is offered and ensures that records of written student complaints and the disposition of those written complaints are maintained.

## **STANDARD 8: Admissions, Records, and Publications**

The program maintains and adheres to policies on admissions, records, and public disclosure consistent with its mission and learning objectives and as prescribed by policy of the institution at which the program is offered.

### CRITERIA

8.a The program publishes through the institution at which the program is offered clear and accurate statements describing admission requirements for the program, transfer of credit policy, academic requirements for students enrolled in the program, the causes for removal and readmission to the program, and the collection and retention of student academic records relevant to the program.

8.b The program follows an academic calendar which states the number of terms per year, the number of weeks per term, and the number of hours of instruction per week and which is consistent with and supports the program's mission and learning objectives.

8.c The program conducts a regular review of published information, printed and electronic, to ensure that it is clear and accurate, accessible, and sufficient for intended audiences, i.e., program's students, prospective students and the interested public, to make informed decisions about the program's mission, learning objectives, and policies.