



# Accreditation Standards

*Effective March 1, 2025*

## REQUIRED BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Institutional Mission and Objectives

#### 1. Institutional Mission

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: A mission statement outlines the purpose of an institution or program and provides clear direction for the ongoing development and operation of the institution or program. In developing and revising a mission statement, an institution or program should consider the needs of society, the profession, and the students for whom the program is intended. The institution's or program's success will be evaluated in relation to its mission. Therefore, the institution must have a mission statement that is published, well-communicated, and implemented throughout the organization's programs and daily operations.*

#### 2. Institutional Goals or Objectives

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: In addition to a general mission statement, the institution has goals or objectives to measure its effectiveness. These goals or objectives are derived from the general mission statement and are stated in specific, measurable terms. They are then used to guide the development and evaluation of all educational programs and institutional services.*

## STANDARDS for BOTH PROGRAMMATIC and INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

### I. Program Approvals

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Prior to accreditation, programs must receive state and/or any other applicable approvals to offer the certificate or degree. Standard I refers specifically to the approvals required for the massage/bodywork or esthetics programs. Any institutional approvals are considered in the Standard for Institutional Accreditation. Requirements vary based on the jurisdiction. In some states, programs must be approved by a state education agency and/or the specific professional licensing board. Institutions must demonstrate knowledge of and compliance with all applicable state regulations, as well as all applicable accreditation standards from COMTA or other institutional accrediting agencies.*

- A. The programs under consideration for COMTA accreditation have current approval(s) as required by law and regulation in their jurisdictions, including state education agencies, state private postsecondary regulators, or massage or esthetics licensing boards.

- B. Individual programs are in compliance with all standards and policies of their institutional accrediting agency.
- C. Changes to accredited programs must be reported to COMTA in accordance with applicable policies.

## II. Curriculum and Instruction

### A. Programmatic Educational Objectives

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Clearly specified objectives for each certificate or degree program are derived from the institutional mission/goals. These programmatic educational objectives are published and guide the development of the curriculum, course content, course objectives, and evaluation methods. If there are multiple massage or esthetics certificates/degree programs, there are separate educational objectives for each program that clearly delineate their different purposes.*

1. Each program has clearly stated educational objectives that are published and consistent with the institution's mission.
2. Program objectives are stated in measurable terms so they may be used to evaluate program effectiveness and outcomes.
3. Program objectives are integrated throughout the curriculum, instruction, and evaluation methods.

### B. Curriculum Design

The curriculum is designed comprehensively, is organized systematically for effective learning, and prepares students for professional practice.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The curriculum is the plan for student learning and is where the institutional mission and programmatic objectives are realized. COMTA's curriculum standard includes three main components: organization, length, and content. The curriculum can be organized in a variety of ways, depending on the school's mission and educational philosophy. If an integrated curriculum model is used, schools should assure that course learning objectives are appropriately delineated and assessed between subjects. If a modular curriculum delivery method is used, specific steps should be taken to ensure that the needs of both beginning and more advanced students are met.*

1. Programs are organized for optimal student learning, including the following considerations:
  - a. Programs are comprised of separate courses, which are organized by content area, by term, or by a combination of content and term.
  - b. Each course has clearly identified learning objectives.
  - c. Programs are designed for systematic and sequential learning.
    - (i) All course prerequisites are clearly identified and enforced to ensure concept mastery prior to a student advancing.
2. The program length complies with the following:
  - a. The mission and objectives of the institution and program;
  - b. Professional licensing/credentialing requirements for the applicable jurisdictions and/or commonly accepted national standards in the field;

- c. Equals or exceeds the number of hours required for state licensure or, in the absence of state licensure hour requirement, a minimum of 625 classroom and clinic/fieldwork hours that are directly supervised by qualified faculty members; and
  - d. Standard academic measures of course length as defined by the applicable regulatory agency (i.e., clock hour definitions, clock hour to academic credit conversions, term length).
    - (i) Schools seeking COMTA institutional accreditation use the COMTA Standard Academic Measurement Policy.
    - (ii) For programmatic accreditation, in the absence of other regulatory policies, the COMTA policy applies.
3. The program's curriculum content is coherent and demonstrates that it has been designed with the following in mind:
- a. The mission and objectives of the institution and program, as well as the principles and values that are being emphasized by the program;
  - b. Professional licensing and/or credentialing requirements for the jurisdictions in which the school operates, jurisdictions for which the school prepares graduates, and/or national professional standards;
  - c. Historical foundations in the field;
  - d. Recent developments in the field;
  - e. Sound educational models and current learning theories; and
  - f. COMTA Competencies (see next standard).
4. Curriculum Competencies

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Curriculum competencies reflect standards of professional knowledge and abilities. Evaluating a program in terms of student competency places the emphasis on student learning, as opposed to how much time is devoted to each topic. As a specialized accrediting agency, COMTA has created a comprehensive list of content competencies that describe what graduates should know and be able to perform. Schools/programs must demonstrate how these competencies are being taught and assessed. The Commission's six general competency areas are as follows:*

1. *Plan and organize an effective massage and bodywork session or esthetic treatment.*
2. *Perform massage therapy and bodywork or esthetic treatments for therapeutic benefit.*
3. *Develop and implement a self-care strategy.*
4. *Develop successful and ethical therapeutic relationships with clients.*
5. *Develop a strategy for a successful practice, business, or employment situation.*
6. *Identify strategies for professional development.*

*Programs should refer to COMTA Competency Charts for a complete list of the specific elements within each competency area.*

- a. **Massage/Bodywork Curriculum Competencies**  
Programs meet the minimum competencies found in COMTA's Competency Chart, as demonstrated through teaching and student assessment.
- b. **Esthetic Curriculum Competencies**  
Programs meet the minimum competencies found in COMTA's Competency Chart, as demonstrated through teaching and student assessment.

### C. Syllabi

Programs ensure documentation and consistent implementation of curriculum through the use of clear syllabi distributed to students at the beginning of each course, module, or unit. These syllabi comply with the COMTA Syllabi Checklist.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The syllabus is the documentation and implementation tool for the course curriculum. It also serves as a written contract between school and student, serves as an archival record of student learning, and clarifies expectations to increase student success. Syllabi should be developed and distributed at the beginning of each course, module, or unit and followed consistently.*

### D. Methods of instruction and evaluation

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The written curriculum is executed through classroom instruction and evaluation. Quality instruction may be delivered in a variety of ways according to student need and instructor judgment. Instruction should encourage active participation by students and a direct focus on meeting diverse student needs. Sound adult learning theories should guide instructional choices and be evident in lesson plans and classroom observation. In addition, quality evaluation methods are essential for confidence in students' proficiency. Practical (hands-on) exams should be used routinely. These should be documented and employed consistently with predetermined rubrics or checklists.*

1. Teaching methods are appropriate to course content, meet the needs of diverse learners, and are designed to encourage and enhance learner participation and involvement.
  - a. The teacher to student ratio reasonably ensures effective teaching and learning in both lecture and lab/hands-on courses. This ratio is clearly published.
2. Evaluation methods (such as written and practical tests, papers, assignments, classroom observation, etc.) are used appropriately to assess student knowledge and skills.
  - a. Measurable performance standards are clearly outlined.
  - b. Students are evaluated using both written and practical (hands-on) assessments based on a predetermined body of knowledge and/or set of skills (i.e., checklists or rubrics for practical exams) that reflect the educational objectives of the course.
  - c. Faculty members use assessment methods and grading consistently in determining whether performance standards are met.
  - d. Students receive timely and regular feedback on their performance during the course.

### E. Clinic/Fieldwork

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The clinic/fieldwork experience is a vital component of student learning. Clinic/fieldwork should be considered an integral part of the instructional process, with appropriate learning objectives and evaluation tools. Clinics may be either permanent health centers in which students operate or temporary clinics in classrooms, as long as the program can substantiate that the experience models professional procedures and involves members of the general public. Off-site, supervised fieldwork may also be included, but hands-on practice in other classes may not be considered part of the clinic hours.*

Programs include clinic/fieldwork instruction as an integrated part of the curriculum according to the following requirements:

1. The clinic/fieldwork component is a distinct course with its own learning objectives and evaluation methods (as evidenced by a written syllabus).
2. Students practice on members of the general public.
3. Clinics are designed to model professional procedures.
4. Students are supervised and evaluated by qualified faculty members.
5. Clinic/fieldwork hours are appropriate to the length of the program and adhere to the following:
  - a. Hours do not exceed 25 percent of the required hours of the program.
  - b. A minimum number of hours/client sessions on the general public must be performed and documented. (See COMTA Clinic Guidelines.)
6. Clinics are operated in compliance with all applicable laws.

F. Externship (if applicable)

If clock hours or academic credit are awarded for an externship experience, it must meet the following standards:

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Externships involve experiential learning done away from the school. Schools may plan and coordinate these experiences to allow students to work with the general public while being supervised by a qualified professional who is not associated with the school. Externships are not a requirement for COMTA-accredited programs. However, if students are allowed to complete externships (as either a requirement or an elective), the experience must meet the COMTA definition of externship (see Definition of Terms and the following standards).*

1. The externship is a distinct course with its own learning objectives and evaluation methods (as evidenced by a written syllabus).
2. Externship hours are appropriate to the length of the program and adhere to the following:
  - a. Hours are over and above the hours required for accreditation.
  - b. Hours do not exceed 20 percent of total program hours.
3. There is a written agreement signed by the program faculty and externship site personnel that clearly defines the obligations of the onsite supervisors, the faculty coordinator, and the student.
4. Student performance is supervised by an onsite supervisor who is legally qualified to do so.
5. Student performance is evaluated by a qualified faculty coordinator (employee of the school), and students are provided with planned opportunities to discuss the experience and their performance with the faculty coordinator.

G. Learning/Library Resources

Students have reasonable access to library and learning resources, including electronic resources, which support the program objectives.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: It is essential that postsecondary institutions have a library and/or learning resource center. The library should contain learning resources that are incorporated into the curriculum, support the research competency, and serve as reference materials for practical work in the clinic.*

1. Library and learning resources are accessible to all students during and beyond classroom hours and are available via hard copy and/or electronically.
2. Learning resources are integrated into the curriculum and instruction, and students and faculty are oriented to their use.
- 3.

### **III. Program Administration and Faculty**

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The individuals involved in a program's execution are key to its success. Therefore, the program should be properly managed by a qualified individual with time and resources dedicated for administration beyond teaching obligations. Further, faculty members should have the educational background, field experience, and proper credentials to competently teach their assigned courses. In addition to expertise in professional technique, schools must ensure that instructors are qualified in teaching skills, and/or receive proper training and ongoing development in this area.*

#### **A. Program Administration**

Programs are adequately managed by qualified individuals who maintain currency in the field.

1. There is at least one full-time employee of the institution designated as program director (or equivalent title) with responsibility for the supervision, management, and administration of the program.
  - a. If the program director is also a faculty member, non-instructional time is scheduled to effectively fulfill administrative and compliance duties.
2. Individuals with specific responsibilities for curriculum design, curriculum assessment, instructional supervision, and instructional evaluation have appropriate education or experience to perform their functions effectively.
3. The employee designated with primary responsibility for the program maintains current awareness of the field through professional development specific to the program.
4. Methods are in place to ensure the integrity of the program during changes in administrative staff.
5. For programmatic accreditation, there is a realistic program budget demonstrating adequate resources and institutional support of the program.

#### **B. Faculty Qualifications**

All instructors are academically and professionally qualified, based upon the following:

1. Instructors are qualified and/or trained in instructional methods and classroom management.
2. Instructors of theory and technique have a minimum of two (2) years of practical experience and are able to demonstrate the appropriate knowledge or expertise as required by the course learning objectives.
3. Instructors of anatomy physiology, and pathology have advanced proficiency in these sciences which is broader and more advanced than the material being taught. (See Faculty Qualifications, Development and Evaluation Guidelines.)
4. Instructors of theory and technique hold a current professional license, certification or other credential as required by applicable laws.
  - a. This requirement is waived for nonresidents of the jurisdiction if the credential is not available to nonresidents, or if the nonresident instructor provides no more than 20 hours of instruction over the length of the program.
  - b. If there are no professional licensing requirements, instructors of theory and technique must be eligible to sit for an appropriate licensing/certification exam or provide evidence of equivalent training or experience in lieu of eligibility.
5. Current evidence of instructor qualifications is maintained in faculty files.

#### C. Faculty Supervision

1. The institution or program uses standards of instructional performance and professionalism to guide hiring, periodic reviews of performance, and professional development of its faculty.
2. New instructors receive adequate orientation and training on job expectations.
3. Faculty members routinely participate in ongoing professional development in both technical knowledge and instructional skills, including training in distance education delivery methods, when applicable.
  - a. Documentation of such training is maintained by the institution.
4. All instructors receive written evaluations on a regular and routine basis from their supervisor. These evaluations follow COMTA's Faculty Qualifications, Development and Evaluation Guidelines.
5. Methods are in place to ensure the quality of instruction through reasonable continuity of the faculty.

#### IV. Instructional Facilities and Professional Environment

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: A professional environment includes adequate and well-maintained facilities, equipment, and supplies. Teaching and modeling the standards of practice also create a professional and optimal learning environment. Programs should have in place clear codes of conduct for professional behavior, including appropriate boundaries and draping, as well as sexual harassment policies and professional liability insurance.*

- A. Instructional facilities (lecture and hands-on classrooms and clinic/laboratory spaces) support professionalism, are adequate to meet the program objectives and student needs, and are in compliance with all applicable laws.
  - 1. There is adequate access to sanitation (e.g., restrooms, sinks, hand sanitizer) to support “standard precautions.” (See Definition of Terms.)
- B. Programs use industry-current instructional equipment and materials that are adequate and maintained to meet the program objectives and student needs.
- C. To support professionalism in the school environment:
  - 1. There is a published student code of conduct that models professional industry standards (including hygiene and draping) and is implemented in classroom activities.
  - 2. The institution or program has a published policy and procedure for preventing sexual harassment and handling complaints in the learning environment that is compliant with all applicable laws. The published policy includes a definition of “sexual harassment” and clear procedures for addressing complaints.
  - 3. Adequate professional liability insurance is maintained for the institution, faculty, and all students.

## V. Program Admissions

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: This standard refers only to those admissions processes and procedures that are specific to the massage/bodywork or esthetics program. Admission requirements, policies, and procedures may be set by the institution to be the same for all programs, or they may be program-specific. All such admission policies and procedures should comply with federal requirements, be consistent with the mission and program objectives, and ensure that only those students who can reasonably be expected to benefit are admitted. The criteria by which students are selected for admission should be consistently applied and documented in student files. Additional standards regarding advertising and recruiting are included in the Standards for Institutional Accreditation.*

- A. Admissions Policies and Procedures
 

Institutions or programs have published admissions requirements and procedures that are adhered to consistently.

  - 1. Admissions policies and procedures are consistent with the institutional mission and program objectives.
  - 2. The admissions requirements are designed to ensure that programs only admit those students who can reasonably be expected to benefit from the instruction. The requirements include but are not limited to the following:
    - a. Applicants must possess evidence of high school graduation or a recognized equivalency (See Definition of Terms).
    - b. If applicants do not possess evidence of high school graduation or the equivalent, they must demonstrate their ability to benefit from the training by passing an approved exam.



- c. Applicants without high school graduation or equivalent must be beyond the compulsory age of attendance as defined by state law.
3. All admissions decisions are based on clearly published admissions criteria.
    - a. The institution or program maintains admission documentation in student files as evidence confirming an applicant's eligibility.
    - b. Institutions or programs maintain documentation of the reasons for the denial of admission to any applicant.
- B. Program Advertisement and Disclosures
1. Programs are accurately represented in all the institution's marketing and promotional materials, as well as in all verbal representations.
  2. Disclosures
    - a. Costs
 

Total program costs are clearly disclosed for prospective students.

      - (i) Total program costs are available in program information even if the institution itself does not publish total cost.
    - b. Accreditation status
 

Institutions and programs accurately represent their accreditation status.

      - (i) No institution or program may use the term "accredited" unless it indicates by what agency or organization it is accredited.
      - (ii) Institutions having branch locations clearly identify the accreditation status of each of the branch locations.
      - (iii) Institutions or programs accredited by COMTA must name "COMTA" or "Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation" when referring to its accreditation. This language may be used with or without the COMTA logo.
      - (iv) The COMTA logo may only be used in the form provided by COMTA.
    - c. Licensing requirements
 

Institutions or programs must publish in the catalog or student handbook current licensing requirements, including:

      - (i) A brief description of regulations in the state of training, as well as contact information in the state of training, with a statement that requirements in other states may differ;
      - (ii) Reference to a reputable resource that lists the names, addresses, and licensing requirements for all the appropriate regulatory agencies in all states that regulate the practice of massage therapy and bodywork and/or esthetics/skin care (e.g., AMTA, ABMP, or similar resource that is updated regularly with information for ALL states);
      - (iii) The understanding that local municipal ordinances may apply in the absence of, or addition to, state law;
      - (iv) A written disclosure of any circumstance that would adversely impact an applicant's ability to gain a license and/or employment in the field after graduation (e.g., criminal record, failure to pass exams, failure to gain other credentialing requirements).
    - d. Salary and Employment Expectations

- (i) If institutions or programs provide information about salary or employment opportunities to prospective students, either in written or verbal form, such information must be accurate and identify the source and date.

## VI. Student Experience and Support

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Open communication channels, responsive complaint procedures, and adequate support services are part of a student-centered culture. Institutions and/or programs should take measures to ensure student needs are addressed and student feedback is honored. These services may be provided at the institutional or programmatic level, but they should consider the specific needs of the massage/bodywork or esthetics student.*

### A. Student Communication and Feedback

The institution and/or program representatives are proactive in initiating and responding to communications with students, both formally and informally.

1. Effective mechanisms exist for consistent and systematic communication between students, administration, and faculty.
2. Student feedback/evaluation is solicited and responded to on a regular basis.
  - a. Institutions and/or programs use anonymous student evaluations as part of gathering input (e.g. routine class evaluations, student feedback on programmatic effectiveness).
  - b. There is a system in place for the analysis of such evaluations.
  - c. Institutions and/or programs take appropriate action based on feedback as necessary.

### B. Complaint Procedure

The institution and/or program provides a written complaint policy to all students upon admission that describes the procedure to be followed, an objective third party school official to whom the complaint should be addressed, a specific and reasonable time frame for response, and the contact information for all applicable regulatory agencies.

1. The institution or program maintains written records of all formal student complaints and their resolution.
2. COMTA-accredited institutions and programs reference the COMTA Complaint Policy and procedures for situations when the school procedure has been exhausted without resolution.

### C. Placement Services

1. Graduate placement assistance consistent with the mission and objectives is provided as needed to ensure employment outcomes adequate to meet COMTA benchmarks. The extent and nature of placement services are clearly published for students.
2. The institution or program keeps verifiable records of each graduate's initial employment on file for five years. Any statement regarding the percentage of graduate employment (i.e., annual employment rates of graduates) must be based upon these verifiable records.

- D. For programmatic accreditation only: Students have access to all student services provided to other students within the institution, as well as to program-specific student services.

1. The institution or program maintains academic advising and support that meets the specific needs of massage/bodywork or esthetics students, including program-specific advising, tutoring, and/or placement services (e.g. tutoring is provided in hands-on technique, not just general education courses; placement services are specific to the field).

## VII. Student Performance and Transcripts

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Institutions and programs monitor and maintain records of students' progress throughout the program. Students are informed of expected performance standards and receive regular reports of their progress in the program. Due to the essential role transcripts play in industry licensing requirements, transcript authenticity is critical and should be protected. Additional standards regarding student records are included in the Standards for Institutional Accreditation.*

### A. Attendance, Grading Policies, and Procedures

1. Attendance policies comply with all applicable laws and/or accreditation regulations.
2. Faculty and staff consistently enforce institution or program attendance, academic performance, and grading policies.
3. Students regularly receive progress and/or attendance notifications/communications throughout the program.
4. Students are informed when attendance or academic performance standards are not being met

### B. Transcript Verification and Authentication

Institutions and programs develop, publish, and consistently follow policies for student transcripts that conform to all applicable laws and regulations.

1. Transcripts are released only in response to student or graduate request.
2. Institutions use appropriate measures to ensure transcript authenticity (e.g., watermark paper, embossed seal) and include all information as outlined in the COMTA Transcript Policy.
3. All transcript information is accurate and verifiable via other student records.
4. Transcripts are maintained securely, backed up regularly, and kept on file by the school indefinitely.

## VIII. Program Effectiveness

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Accrediting agencies are required to assess institutions and programs based on success in achieving their stated objectives and continual efforts to improve educational quality. Program objectives serve as a guide and a measure for program effectiveness. Therefore, program administration engage in ongoing self-assessment. Programs collect and analyze feedback from a variety of sources, including students, graduates, employers and other interested parties. A Program Advisory*

*Committee is created to assist in formalizing this process. A Program Advisory Committee increases the perspective and broadens the input for review, so it is essential that it include members who are not directly affiliated with the school. The collection of feedback from all parties is then analyzed and used in reviewing and/or revising all aspects of the program. The curriculum itself is regularly reviewed and revised as needed to ensure that it is current and effective in meeting its stated objectives.*

A. Evaluation of Program Objectives

The program has methods in place to measure its success in meeting its educational objectives.

B. Program Advisory Committee

To provide an objective analysis of effectiveness, the program maintains an active Program Advisory Committee that meets the following guidelines:

1. Includes diverse representation with a minimum of five members, at least 40 percent of whom are not directly affiliated with the institution.
  - a. Affiliated members may include staff, faculty, board members, students, recent graduates, and/or educators from other programs within the institution.
  - b. Unaffiliated members may include employers, respected practitioners, members of the public, regulators, graduates of more than 5 years, and/or educators from other schools.
2. A minimum of one synchronous meeting is held per year, with additional interaction occurring periodically (e.g., emails, phone calls, meetings).
3. The institution or program must maintain detailed notes and evidence that the administration has considered the Program Advisory Committee comments.

C. Student Outcomes

To maintain and/or improve program effectiveness, institutions or programs monitor and report completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates on an annual basis.

1. There is a process in place to ensure accuracy of the report which complies with COMTA Student Outcomes Tracking Policy.
2. Verifiable records of all completion and placement data for graduates are maintained by the institution.
3. Programs meet minimum benchmarks for completion and placement rates as established by the Commission, stipulated in the Student Outcomes Tracking Policy. current benchmarks = 65% for completion and placement; proposed new benchmarks = 75% for completion and 75% for placement

D. Data Analysis

Programs have a process for collecting and analyzing data about the quality and effectiveness of educational programs and curriculum content. These data must include:

1. Student outcomes
2. Student evaluations and complaints
3. Graduate feedback

4. Employer feedback
5. Faculty feedback
6. Program Advisory Committee feedback
7. Industry trends, recent developments in the field and outside organizations (e.g., regulatory agencies and professional associations).

E. Program/Curriculum Review and Revision

1. Programs formally consider the results of data collection and analysis in planning and implementing change in the educational programs.
2. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and revised as necessary.
3. This revision process is documented.

## IX. Degree Programs

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: In addition to complying with all other applicable standards, programs that offer degrees have additional responsibilities to ensure appropriate academic rigor and compliance with all applicable laws. The type of degree offered may be determined by the state, and institutional standards often govern the structure. Degrees are intended to develop practitioners for an academic path. Accordingly, the inclusion of general education courses supports a broader educational experience that should be reflected in the degree program objectives.*

A. Standards Applicable to All Degree Programs

1. For academic purposes, degree programs are measured in credit hours according to the conversion outlined in the COMTA Standard Academic Measurement Policy.
2. Students admitted to degree programs have earned a high school diploma or recognized equivalency certificate before starting class, and proof of high school diploma or its equivalent is on file at the time of enrollment.
3. Transfer of credit may be applied toward the degree.
  - a. A minimum of 25 percent of the required curriculum must be completed at the school awarding the degree.
  - b. A maximum of 30 semester credits or the equivalent of the general education requirement may be provided by another degree-granting institution.
4. The institution may award appropriate credit to students in attendance at the time the institution becomes degree granting.
  - a. Former students must meet all equivalent course work and degree requirements and complete a minimum of 15 semester credits or the equivalent in the new degree program.

5. Faculty teaching in degree programs meet minimum requirements.
    - a. Instructors for technical courses have a minimum of three (3) years of practical work experience or equivalent training in the field being taught.
    - b. Instructors for general education courses shall hold, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree, with appropriate education in the specific courses being taught.
  6. The institution maintains a library/resource center.
    - a. The library/resource center is supervised by a staff member who demonstrates competence to provide oversight and management.
    - b. The library/resource center includes holdings appropriate to the courses of study, standard works of reference, relevant current periodicals, and relevant reference materials in sufficient titles and numbers to adequately serve the students.
    - c. Study space appropriate for the number of students served is provided.
    - d. Appropriate assistance is available to the students from qualified staff personnel.
- B. Occupational Associate Degree Standards
1. Occupational Associate degrees are a minimum of 60 semester credits or 90 quarter credits.
  2. A minimum of 45 semester credits or 67.5 quarter credits are included in the occupational area for which the degree is offered.
  3. A minimum of six semester credits or nine quarter credits in applied/related education courses are also included.
  4. General education courses may be offered as desired, in which case the faculty requirements apply.
  5. The title of the degree program, the name of the degree, the credential issued, and all advertising, promotional materials and literature make clear that the degree is occupational.
- C. Academic Associate Degree Standards
1. Academic Associate degree programs are a minimum of two academic years.
  2. A minimum of 24 semester credits or 36 quarter credits are general education courses.
  3. A minimum of 30 semester credits or 45 quarter credits are in the technical field for which the degree is awarded.
  4. Full-time and adjunct faculty maintain teaching loads and schedules that allow time for student advising, adequate preparation, and continuing professional growth.
  5. A person with appropriate education or library work experience supervises the library.

## X. Distance Education

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Distance education (both fully online and hybrid courses) utilizes technology to create enriching virtual classroom experiences. Distance education must meet the criteria of supporting regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor. (Independent study or correspondence courses do not meet that criterion.) The Commission acknowledges that there are some competencies within a*

*massage/bodywork or esthetics program that may be taught through distance education. These competencies do not involve hands-on work or require instant oversight or feedback. Programs using distance education must demonstrate continued compliance with these and other applicable standards. (See COMTA's Distance Education Guidelines for additional information.)*

#### A. Basic Approvals

1. Programs that utilize distance education are reviewed and approved by COMTA before being offered (not for initial applicants).
2. Hours awarded for distance education constitute no more than 49 percent of the program clock hours or credits (whichever is less). This includes any general education hours that may be included in a degree program.
3. Institutions and programs must be approved to offer and provide evidence that applicable state licensing boards accept distance education for both in-state and out-of-state students where applicable.

#### B. Curriculum and Instruction

1. Course content does not require on-site, hands-on, or immediate monitoring of student work.
  - a. If any COMTA Competencies are taught or assessed via distance education, methods appropriate to the language of the Competency are used.
2. Hours or credits awarded for distance education courses are equivalent to those offered for similar amount of content in classroom courses.
3. Distance education courses are designed to provide regular, meaningful, effective, and timely interaction between students and faculty.
4. The program maintains control over the curriculum within the distance education courses and can make revisions as needed. The program must be able to adjust course delivery as needed to meet student needs.
5. Faculty teaching distance education courses are experienced and/or trained in distance education methods.

#### C. Security and Assessment

1. Distance education course information for students and faculty is private and secure via log-in username and password.
2. Distance education courses are designed to provide effective assessment of student learning.
3. Programs and distance education course faculty design processes through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit.
  - a. Such methods may include, as appropriate, providing a secure log-in and password, use of two-factor authentication, proctored examinations, monitoring of IP address, or other technologies and/or practices that are effective in verifying each student's identity.

D. Student Support (For Institutional Accreditation Only)

1. Admissions and marketing materials inform prospective students of courses only offered via the distance education formats and any additional costs associated with verification of student identity for distance education courses.
2. Students are oriented to the process of distance education teaching and learning, and/or are assessed to determine preparedness for success in distance learning environments.
3. Student support services are available for students while taking online courses.
4. Courses that utilize distance education formats must meet ADA standards. (See Distance Education Guidelines)

E. Distance Education Infrastructure and Support (For Institutional Accreditation Only)

1. Distance education courses use a learning management system (LMS) or similar platform to facilitate interaction and accountability that is appropriate to the scale of the distance education program.
2. The institution has personnel capable of supporting the distance education hardware/software onsite infrastructure or interface with outside hosts.
3. The institution ensures effective and timely support for hardware and software needs of faculty and students.
4. The institution ensures sufficient bandwidth to provide distance education courses.
5. Distance education course content and activity are backed up daily.



## STANDARDS for INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION ONLY

### XI. Institutional Management and Administration

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Management's primary role is to oversee the development, implementation, and evaluation of an effective institution and/or program. This includes upholding and promoting quality education, as well as maintaining government and accreditation compliance on an ongoing basis. An institution's management and administrative staff should be competent, with well-defined policies and procedures that promote consistency, communication, and regular review and planning.*

#### A. Government Compliance

1. The institution is licensed as required by local, state, or federal law to offer educational services in all current locations.
2. The institution maintains compliance with all local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and accreditation standards.
3. Any substantive change in programs by institutions already COMTA-accredited must be approved by COMTA prior to their being offered to students, including but not limited to, additional certifications or degrees, new programs, or distance education formats.

#### B. Management, Policies, and Procedures

1. Institutions have qualified and adequately staffed management in place.
2. The institution develops, publishes, and follows internal policies and procedures to ensure consistent operation.
3. Mechanisms exist for regular and effective communication between and among management and other staff.
4. Institutional management engages in regular review and planning.
  - a. The institution has a process for measuring success in meeting its mission and objectives.
  - b. Planning is in alignment with the mission and objectives of the institution.
  - c. Planning includes both short-term and long-term goals that are linked to specific resources (e.g., timelines, finances, personnel, facilities).

#### C. Human Resources

Management uses human resource strategies to ensure effective staff performance.

1. Management recruits and hires staff with appropriate training and experience.
2. Management and staff are fully aware of their job descriptions and are provided adequate orientation, supervision, ongoing training, and routine evaluation to ensure proficiency in their positions.
3. Management has in place reasonable measures to ensure the continuity of staff knowledge regarding school policies, regulation, and accreditation standards.

#### D. Employment Policies

1. Non-discrimination  
The institution practices are non-discriminatory with respect to race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity, national origin, disability, age, and genetic information).
2. Sexual harassment  
The institution develops, publishes and strictly adheres to a sexual harassment policy that is in compliance with federal and state government requirements and includes a definition of sexual harassment.
3. Grievance Policy  
Management develops, publishes, and adheres to a grievance policy and procedures for all employees.
  - a. Records of staff and faculty grievances are maintained and are available for inspection by the accrediting agency.

#### E. Institutional Facilities

Non-instructional facilities (administrative facilities and “common areas”) support the continuation of the school and programs, are adequate to meet the mission and objectives, and are in compliance with all applicable laws, building codes and health and safety regulations.

1. Non-instructional facilities (e.g., lobbies, offices, restrooms, lounges, and campus grounds) are safe, accessible, clean, well lit, suitably furnished, and adequate to meet the purpose of the area.
2. If the institution provides student housing, the facilities meet fire, safety, and sanitation standards as required by the applicable regulatory authorities.

## XII. Institutional Financial Practices

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Institutions should be financially sound, show adequate financial planning and management, and comply with all regulatory agency requirements. Verification of financial stability requires annual independently audited, reviewed, or compiled financial reports that follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and COMTA’s Financial Reporting Guidelines. An independent Compilation with Disclosures will also be considered for schools generating less than \$400,000 in gross revenue. In addition, fairness and consistency are required with regard to tuition and refund policies.*

#### A. Financial Stability

Institutions have the fiscal capacity appropriate to the specified scale of the operations to support long-term stability and finances are administered competently and legally.

1. A responsible financial management system serves to protect the continuance of the institution.
  - a. Financial books and bank accounts are separate from any other finances not connected to the institution.

- b. Written policies and procedures exist to assure the safety, accountability, and effective use of financial resources.
2. The institution demonstrates a commitment to the financial resources for the education of all currently enrolled students in a program consistent with the accreditation standards.
  - a. Financial reports provide clear evidence of financial stability and sound fiscal practices (e.g., budget, tuition bond, letter of credit, audited, reviewed or compiled statements, history of income and reserves, current ratio of assets and liabilities).
  - b. Financial statements are prepared in accordance with generally acceptable accounting principles, the COMTA Financial Reporting Guidelines, and all applicable federal, state, and local requirements.
3. Institutions carry adequate general liability insurance for all properties to address extraordinary events that could disrupt business operations (e.g., fire, water, theft, or tampering).

#### B. Student Finance and Tuition Policies

Tuition policies are reasonable, clear and uniformly applied.

1. All program costs, including extra costs, are clearly published and fully disclosed to prospective students.
2. Tuition and fees are charged consistently and adjustments are applied uniformly (e.g., employee discounts, early payments or registration, special cohorts).
3. The tuition and refund policies are published, easy to understand, applied uniformly, and comply with the COMTA Cancellation and Refund Policy.
4. Written records are maintained for all student transactions, and there is a process for ensuring accuracy of records.
5. Institutions participating in state or federal student tuition assistance programs (non-Title IV) comply with all applicable laws and regulations of the sponsoring agency.
6. Institutions that offer scholarships publish the terms, including the basis for selection, deadline dates for applications, the number of scholarships to be awarded, and any other applicable terms and conditions.

### XIII. Advertising, Recruiting, and Enrollment Practices

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Institutions use ethical recruitment and enrollment practices and ensure that all recruitment and enrollment practices comply with applicable regulations. "Recruiting practices" include all activities designed to attract students and lead to student enrollment. These include but are not limited to advertising, public outreach and promotion, correspondence with prospective students, and completing enrollment documents. "Recruiting personnel" refers to anyone whose primary responsibility is recruiting, contacting, or responding to prospective students. These staff positions may have different titles at different institutions, but all are required to comply with the following standards. All activities provide prospective students with*

*complete and accurate information about the institution so that students can make informed enrollment decisions.*

A. Advertising

1. All advertising and promotional materials (including the institution's website) are clear, factually accurate and current, and avoid leaving any false or unsupported impressions of the institution or program, including location name, educational programs, services, policies, and accreditation status.
2. All advertising and promotional materials (including the institution's website) comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including the COMTA Advertising and Recruiting Policy.

B. Recruiting Practices and Personnel

Institutions utilize ethical and legal recruitment practices.

1. Institutions conform to all recruitment laws and regulations of the jurisdiction(s) in which they operate, including any applicable regulatory requirements for recruitment personnel.
2. Institutions have policies and procedures in place to ensure that ethical recruitment practices are followed and information provided to prospective students is accurate. These policies must also comply with the COMTA Advertising and Recruiting Policy.
3. An institution's recruitment efforts focus on attracting only students who are qualified and likely to complete and/or benefit from the education provided.
4. Institutions may not promise prospective students that program completion will guarantee employment, licensure, or certification.
5. Personnel are trained and qualified to engage in recruiting activities and may only use a title that accurately represents the individual's primary duties.
6. An institution does not provide a commission, bonus, or other financial incentive or payment to employees involved in the recruitment or admission of students, nor does it provide financial aid based directly or indirectly on the success in securing enrollment.

C. Catalog

1. A catalog and/or student handbook accurately portrays the institution and program, facilities, resources, and all policies and procedures and is readily available to all prospective students prior to signing an enrollment agreement.
2. A catalog and/or student handbook contains (at minimum) all items in the COMTA Catalog Checklist.
3. The catalog and/or student handbook may be in either a printed or an electronic format, but all versions must be consistent and easily accessible to prospective and current students.

**D. Enrollment Agreements**

The institution ensures that the applicant is fully informed of the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of both the institution and the student under an enrollment agreement or other documentation before enrollment into the institution.

1. Enrollment agreements are completed with all students prior to enrollment and must include, at a minimum, all required items listed on the Enrollment Agreement Checklist.
2. No enrollment agreement is binding until it has been signed by the applicant and accepted and signed by the appropriate school official.
3. A copy of the enrollment agreement is signed by all appropriate parties and furnished to the student before any payment is made.

**E. Non-discrimination**

Admission requirements and procedures must comply with all local, state, and federal regulations.

1. Admissions policies may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity), national origin, disability, age, and genetic information.
2. Institutions or programs reasonably accommodate applicants with disabilities to the extent required by applicable law.

**F. Transfer Credit**

Institutions develop, publish, and consistently implement clear policies regarding transfer of credit into the institution.

1. The transfer credit policy specifies the educational criteria guiding the acceptance of transfer credits, specifies the maximum number of transfer credits that can be accepted toward completion of an accredited program, and outlines the procedure for determining whether transfer credit will be granted.
2. Hours accepted as transfer credit constitute no more than 49 percent of the program clock hours or credits.
3. Records of transfer credit and any supporting documentation remain in the student's file.

**XIV. Student Records and Student Services**

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Institutions monitor and maintain complete records of student progress throughout the program. This includes a clear definition of what constitutes satisfactory academic progress and provisions for ensuring student adherence to the institution's policy. Institutions consider students' academic and non-academic needs and design support services to encourage student success. The institution provides a variety of student services in accordance with its mission and any applicable laws and regulations, and such services reflect the highest ethical standards.*

#### A. Student Record Management

For all currently enrolled students, institutions maintain educational records, which include all admissions, academic, and financial records.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Institutions maintain student records in compliance with all laws, including federal and state regulations (e.g., FERPA). Laws and standard practices for the content, confidentiality, security, and access of records should be followed consistently by all school personnel.*

1. Educational records may be maintained electronically and/or in hard copy and both are accurate, organized, confidentially maintained, and secured from damage or loss (e.g., fire, water, theft, or tampering).
2. Institutions have and follow policies and procedures that comply with all applicable laws, including rights to access and confidentiality.

#### B. Satisfactory Academic Progress

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The institution takes measures to ensure students are making steady progress toward graduation through Satisfactory Academic Progress policies, including regular monitoring and assistance for students not succeeding. The school can determine its own requirements for the policy as long as the following criteria are met. NOTE: For schools participating in Title administration, there are additional requirements within this policy. (See Title IV Compliance Standard XV.)*

1. Institutions have a policy for determining what constitutes satisfactory academic progress throughout that program.
2. The school's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Policy includes consideration of the following:
  - a. Quality of a student's academic work (i.e., grade percentage or grade point average).
  - b. Quantity or amount of time a student has been in the program (i.e., maximum time frame in which students must complete program requirements).
  - c. Clear increments of time when SAP will be assessed, not to exceed the program's midpoint or one year.
  - d. The actions to be taken as a result of failure to meet SAP (e.g., warning letter, academic assistance, probation, termination, or reinstatement).
  - e. An appeal process for those students who are terminated from the program and/or lose funding based on failure to meet SAP.
4. Student progress throughout the program is monitored and SAP requirements are consistently applied to all students.
5. Those students failing to meet the policy are duly informed and assisted prior to any adverse action.
6. Additional requirements apply for those institutions approved to administer federal student aid programs under Title IV of the Higher Education Act. (See Title IV Compliance Standard XV.)

### C. Student Services

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The services provided are designed to support students' academic success. Specific services are provided at the discretion of the institution, based on its size and the demographics of its students.*

1. The institution provides adequate services and resources to support its students in maintaining satisfactory progress, achieving educational outcomes, and making informed decisions regarding training and employment. These services include but are not limited to:
  - a. Academic advising
  - b. Tutoring or other academic support
  - c. Career and employment services
  - d. Non-academic support (e.g., counseling and/or referrals)
  - e. Any other services as required by law
2. Student services are delivered and/or are accessible at the main campus and all branch campuses.
3. Institutions reasonably accommodate students with disabilities to the extent required by applicable law and regulation.
  - a. The institution has a process in place for determining and providing reasonable accommodations for students in accordance with laws and regulations.

### D. Academic Integrity Policy

The institution has a published Academic Integrity Policy that includes clear expectations and disciplinary action for violations of the policy.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: The Academic Integrity Policy is specific to student academic behavior while enrolled in the institution (e.g., no cheating, plagiarism, or other academic dishonesty), this can be in addition to or included within the student code of conduct modeling professional industry standards.*

## XV. Title IV Compliance

Institutions participating in United States Title IV Financial Student Aid (FSA) programs comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

*STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Participating in Title IV administration is a responsibility beyond accreditation.*

### A. Administration

Institutions demonstrate the administrative capability to participate in federal financial aid programs through satisfactory results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and other information provided.

### B. Loan repayment

Institutions participating in federal financial aid have appropriate measures in place designed to encourage students to repay their loans, and the institutions maintain an official student loan default rate that is below the federal threshold.

### C. Required Disclosures

1. Institutions clearly publish all disclosures required by federal financial aid regulation.

2. The catalog of the institution accurately describes the federal financial aid programs in which it participates and includes the requirements students must meet to maintain eligibility for continued participation in these programs.
3. The institution's cancellation and refund policy clearly stipulates procedures for the return of Title IV funds in compliance with federal financial aid regulations.

D. Clock Hour to Credit Conversion

Institutions participating in Title IV administration must comply with Title IV regulations regarding the calculation of aid. Institutions may use the COMTA clock hour-to-credit conversion for academic purposes. (See COMTA Standard Academic Measurement Policy if applicable.)

E. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

Institutions wishing to establish or maintain eligibility to administer Title IV financial aid programs are required to use more specific criteria for their SAP policy. These institutions use the COMTA SAP Guidelines and Title IV regulations to develop their SAP requirements.