



## Guidelines Regarding Dual and Joint Degrees

### Definitions

A *dual degree program* is one in which *two degrees* are authorized and conferred separately by two or more partner schools, by two departments or divisions within the same school (e.g., a dual MDiv/MBA by a seminary and business school within the same institution), or even by the same school (e.g., a dual MDiv/MRE). In any case, the two degrees recognize efficiencies in course taking in the fulfillment of the requirements for the respective degrees. Each school is primarily responsible for its own degree.

A *joint degree program* is one in which a single degree is authorized and conferred by two or more partner schools with faculty, administration, and governance boards agreeing to share educational resources, responsibility, accountability, and authority for the degree.

### Approval by the ATS Commission on Accrediting

Commission approval for dual or joint degree programs is required only if the degree(s) offered by the member school involve(s) a substantive change (e.g., new programs, new delivery methods, or exceptions to Commission Standards; see ATS [Commission Policies and Procedures](#), VII.C.1). The Commission does not list dual or joint degrees under its list of approved degrees on the ATS website; it lists only each separately approved degree offered by member schools. Member schools with any questions about dual or joint degree programs should consult with their accrediting staff liaison; they are also encouraged to review the Commission's expectations regarding degree programs as described in the [General Institutional Standards](#), [Educational Standard](#), and [Degree Program Standards](#).

The *General Institutional Standards* as a whole provide the framework for the context of these programs; the *Educational Standard* provides guidance on the types of degrees allowed, degree program nomenclature, and educational assessment. The *Degree Program Standards* provide guidance on the purpose, content, learning outcomes, structure, and resources needed for individual degrees. General Institutional Standard 8, section 8.6.2, provides particular guidance on these kinds of cooperative arrangements, including the need for careful design, sufficient legal safeguards, adequate public disclosure, provisions for review, and clear rationale. If the joint or dual degree program involves a non-North American institution, schools should also consult the [Guidelines for Petitioning for International Theological Education](#).

## **Application of Standards, procedures, and policies for dual and joint degree programs**

Member schools are expected to design and operate dual and joint degree offerings in conformity with the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation, procedures, and policies, including, but not limited to mission, integrity, curriculum, and resources. In particular, member schools are expected to ensure the integrity of operations and quality of these dual and joint degree programs and courses leading to approved degrees that are awarded, including those of any partner institutions. Member schools offering dual and joint degrees are expected to have the appropriate governmental permissions, to have clear written plans to offer, to monitor and assess these programs, and to have clear, detailed agreements with partner institutions that describe all aspects of the relationship including, but not limited to such areas as administration, finance, and governance related to the operation of the program.

### **Status of and relationship with partner institution(s)**

If the dual or joint degree involves one or more partner institutions, the partner institution(s) must be duly licensed, approved, recognized, or accredited by the appropriate bodies, agencies, or their North American counterparts. If the partnering institution is not accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting, the program agreement must assure that the Commission member school has sufficient authority over the program to ensure that the program is in conformity with sound educational practices and the Standards of Accreditation.

When the partnering institution is not accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting, the member institution must make clear in all written communications with students and the public that its accreditation by the ATS Commission on Accrediting does not extend to the partner institution. To this end, the following disclaimer must be used: “[Name of member institution] is accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools. [Name of partnering entity or institution] is [accredited or approved] by [the name of the agency].”

### **Limitations**

Nothing in these guidelines should be interpreted in any way that contradicts existing Commission Standards, procedures, or policies, which remain the definitive documents.