Chapter 3
Common Standards for Online Education Found in Accrediting Organizations

ABSTRACT
Standards for education are established by a number of governing agencies including regional accreditation committees, national accreditation committees, committees on educational standards within colleges and universities, and the United States Department of Education. These standards are long-established and are updated occasionally to reflect the changes in the fields of education. This chapter discusses the standards, as they exist today, in all of the aforementioned accreditation committees. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the educational standards as they currently exist for distance and online education, such as the standards for teacher training, professional development opportunities, and resources for online faculty.

INTRODUCTION
The educational process requires feedback from the professor, from the student, and from the wider community, especially businesses who hire the graduates. As e-learning and higher education reach new heights, they are changing the function of the university. E-learning changes all the ground rules, including time, distance, and pedagogy. We now have new ways to reach and interact with students, present rich content in courses, and deliver the technologies of the smart classroom to students, wherever they are in the world—C.E. Beck & G.R. Schornack (2004).
Presently, there are a number of standards used to identify quality and sufficiency in online education. Many of these standards, though, are borrowed or extended from traditional pedagogical standards, which (as will be discussed in Chapter Five of this text) has many unique differences from online pedagogy. A starting point for discussing the present day standards would be to examine the national and regional college-level accreditation standards.

First, it is important to understand the origin and placement of regional accreditation standards within the academic system. The U.S. Department of Education’s Secretary of Education makes decisions regarding the requirements of and eligibility for accrediting programs, majors, departments, and entire institutions. There are two general types of accreditation available from the Secretary of Education: “institutional” and “specialized” or “programmatic” (“Types of Accreditation,” par. 1). The U.S. Department of Education’s accreditation documents (readily available online) list the definitions as follows: “Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of the institution’s parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution’s objectives, although not necessarily all at the same level of quality” (“Types of Accreditation,” par. 2). Or:

Specialized or programmatic accreditation normally applies to programs, departments, or schools that are parts of an institution. The accredited unit may be as large as a college or school within a university or as small as a curriculum within a discipline. Most of the specialized or programmatic accrediting agencies review units within an institution of higher education that is accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies. However, certain accrediting agencies also accredit professional schools and other specialized or vocational institutions of higher education that are freestanding in their operations (par. 3).

There are several specialized or programmatic accrediting bodies recognized by the Department of Education. Some examples of specialized or programmatic accreditation committees include: the National Association of Schools on Art and Design, Commission on Accreditation; the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education; the American Bar Association, Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar; the Association for Biblical Higher Education, Commission on Accreditation; the American Board of Funeral Service Education, Committee on Accreditation (“Specialized Accrediting Agencies”). A comprehensive list including descriptions of these accreditation committees, as well as links to their program websites can be found through the Department of Education website. But, as you can be seen from these association titles, the specialized or programmatic accreditation bodies are affiliated with a particular type of education or training within an institution’s programs.

For many traditional ground institutions, following the regulations established for institutional accreditation means the standards associated with the regional accreditation committee. The United States is divided into six regions for accreditation purposes: New