

Accreditation, Summit Bible College and You by Dr. Jeff Victor

I. Where are We at Now?

Our position on accreditation is that we are interested in it but there are several hurdles that must happen first; many of them hinge on the right timing. We have been working with the Association of Biblical Higher Education, formerly the AABC (they have visited our office and made suggestions for the future). We began the process as an “affiliate” in 2005. You can look at this Dept. of Education approved agency at: <http://abhe.gospelcom.net/>.

What are the hurdles?

Many of these accrediting bodies, including the ABHE, require a full time staff (Summit Bible College only uses adjunct professors), a full library (most of our students are on the internet and use libraries in their home towns or online), physical facilities and high fees and dues. There are other accrediting agencies that have different requirements but all of them are high profile, government monitored agencies with high regulatory statutes.

What is Accreditation?

Accreditation originally was a process for making sure that institutions do what they say they will do. It was a process designed so institutions could have a ‘watch dog’ agency review their integrity, finances and policies. Certain institutions such as Harvard never have had accreditation because of their high quality programs and educational integrity. Today accreditation usually is a legalistic, governmentally controlled process that is very expensive.

Summit’s goals are to do the high quality programs with God’s integrity. We want to put that first, at a low cost to the students. We have ascribed to this through a Christian watch group the “ACEA” (see our website).

However, we are cautious about full accreditation until we are able complete the full process. For example, have you noticed the difference in costs between accredited and non-accredited institutions? Summit Bible College’s goal is to keep the quality of an accredited college yet charge the costs of the non-accredited institution. Our degrees have that quality, and our costs are low because we are saving money for you. Because of the quality of our programs we have been accepted by most ministries and by many accredited colleges (Accredited universities, such as: Azusa Pacific in Los Angeles, Northern Michigan University and the University of Phoenix, have accepted our degrees or credits.).

So, where does that leave us? Summit is interested in full accreditation but the process must allow us to meet our goals while keeping us financially stable. So, although accreditation can be valuable it is a secondary concern of the college. Our goal is to do a quality job and provide a low cost plan for ministers to be equipped. We will achieve full accreditation at the right time with the right doors open.

Most importantly, we are under standards to help guide us in doing the right thing for our students. We have a board of directors, bylaws and a mission statement, and a constitution that keep us pointed to “Equipping Christian leaders to help those in need.”

Also, we the have right, from the State of California, to issue degrees in theology and license ministers. You can visit their website at:

https://app.dca.ca.gov/bppve/school-search/view-voc-names.asp?schnname=&city=&county=&program=&program_keyword=theology&intJump=100&intRecords=50

We are able to license ministers because the IRS has granted us this through our bylaws.

II. So, where are we going?

Accreditation is a lengthy project and takes up to 4-5 years for full accreditation. We have considered teaming with other colleges and being accredited through them. It is faster to form a "coalition" with another college but there are always caveats, because their goals are much more "corporate" and we don't want to change the emphasis of Summit Bible College, such as: "stronger on the practical and less on the theory", "a 1st century church emphasis", "purely theological as the Lord would minister", "equipping Christian leaders to help those in need", and "quality curriculum at a reasonable price". Another future possibility could be to separate the college into two separate institutions: 1. Undergraduate "Summit Bible College", staying as it is today, and 2. A graduate "Summit Theological Seminary" going with the Association of Theological Seminaries (ATS) accrediting for our graduate degrees.

What is keeping us from proceeding right now?

To actually begin the process is really a matter of financing. This involves several factors: issues ranging from core curriculum classes to full time professors.

We just purchased a building in downtown Bakersfield, and we have begun live video streaming over the internet. We are also starting a Master's Commission with a local church in Bakersfield while expanding in several areas. Once we conclude this phase and go to Phase III we will more actively pursue full accreditation. That could be soon or as late as 3-5 years depending on the capital campaign that our Funding Director has begun.

This large vision of a \$30 million dollar building project would be a better time to include full accreditation. So, full accreditation could begin at any time with the right funding.

III. Direct Costs of Accreditation

One fact to understand about accreditation is that its 'direct costs' can be an expensive process. It costs about \$5-10,000 per year, or more, just for the process. Plus there are restrictive aspects about what you teach, resources, make up of the corporation and its employees. Right now, Summit operates on a very tight budget, making sure that we stay strong fiscally, so that we can offer the lowest prices possible. Also, we want the freedom to teach Theology as the Lord directs, and not as another organization dictates. Once we do have full accreditation our prices will have to increase. We want to keep them low, so raising funds for the difference in costs will be necessary. If you have a desire to contribute funds to the accreditation process, your donation will be marked for that and kept separate in a special account.

IV. Is there "Grandfathering" of My Degree

There is no 'grandfathering' of a degree. Once accreditation is achieved by an institution, it only includes the degrees that go through once the institution is accredited. Even degrees that are partially completed during that time may have a requirement of more hours or more work. In other words, if you earn your degree before accreditation, you can't say my degree is accredited. However, that subject rarely comes up. The more positive way to look at it is to understand that once Summit Bible College receives accreditation you can say your degree is from a college that is accredited.

V. What About Approval of Your Degree

The most important point about accreditation is that we are in the business of helping Christian leaders prepare for the harvest of ministering to God's people. We have been given "approval" in this matter from many ministries, Christian Colleges and organizations that hire Christian ministers. They have approved of what we are doing, by hiring the people we graduate or by accepting their degree to another college: all to the glory of God. It is better that we have this kind of approval than "man's" approval, in our estimation. Many of our students are ministering at churches, rehabilitation centers, rest homes, food banks, counseling centers, shelters and churches. This is why we do what we do. We are an IRS 501 c 3 non profit organization and as a "faith based" organization we want to help the community by preparing workers to help other people.

VI. When is Accreditation Necessary?

Accreditation may be a need for some people, if they want credits for a promotion at work (like teachers) or for some government programs or loans; the accreditation, such as the ABHE, gives approval because the US Dept of Education recognizes them. Accreditation normally isn't necessary for someone seeking to receive a degree and do the work of the Lord and earn approval from Christian organizations.

To date our degrees have not been turned down by ministries, and we know of several cases where people have transferred credits from SBC to other accredited colleges. Remember, even accredited college degrees and credits do not necessarily transfer to other accredited colleges. It depends on the "receiving" college's desire to accept the credits and several other factors such as the type of class, the requirements of the new program and the policy of the receiving college. Some denominations require more course work to teach our graduates their doctrine. Usually this is an additional class or two. Check with your denomination for their specific requirements.

VII. About the Issue and Use of the Title of "Doctor"

If an individual earns a doctorate and it is from a college that has the legal right to issue degrees of that level (as we do in the State of California), then they have the right to be called "Doctor".

Sadly, colleges called "paper mills" charge people for the degree just so they can have the title "Doctor"; this is an illegal practice. Summit Bible College is not a paper mill and the quality of the work is proof of that. Many have said that our work is challenging but spiritually and practically beneficial and that they have grown greatly from it. In this, we praise God! See our testimonial page at: <http://www.summitbiblecollege.com/online/testimony.htm>. A person can add the DTh, DMin or DDiv at the end of their name, too, if they choose.

Bottom line: If you want a great education to prepare you for ministry, Summit Bible College is an excellent method to help you fulfill that need.

In His Work,

Dr. Jeff Victor
President
Summit Bible College

"Equipping Christian Leaders to Help Those in Need"

www.summitbiblecollege.com