

TOPIC: DEGREE AUTHORIZATION ACT: ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF MINISTRY & THEOLOGY REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION AS A SEMINARY/RELIGIOUS TRAINING INSTITUTION

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I. SUMMARY

This agenda item recommends reauthorization for Rocky Mountain School of Ministry & Theology as a Seminary or Religious Training Institution pursuant to the provisions of the Degree Authorization Act (C.R.S. §23-2-103.3).

II. BACKGROUND

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) has statutory responsibility for administration of Title 23, Article 2 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, which authorizes certain types of institutions to offer degrees and/or degree credits. These are: (1) Colorado publicly supported colleges and universities; (2) properly accredited private colleges and universities; (3) postsecondary seminaries and bible colleges; and (4) private occupational schools authorized by the Division of Private Occupational School. Persons or unauthorized organizations that violate the provisions of the statute are subject to legal penalties.

All private colleges and universities, out of state public colleges and universities, and seminaries or bible colleges are required to register with the Colorado Department of Higher Education and to meet criteria found in CCHE Policy Section I Part J, Degree Authorization Act, in order to receive authorization to offer degrees within Colorado. Such authorization must be received by the institution prior to offering any program of instruction, academic credits, or degrees; opening a place of business; soliciting students or enrollees; or offering educational support services.

The Commission administers the Degree Authorization Act by determining an institution's eligibility to operate pursuant to statute and CCHE policy. Statute requires Commission action for institutional authorization at any level.

In the case of a seminary or bible college, an institution must qualify as a bona fide religious postsecondary educational institution which is exempt from property taxation under the laws of this state. It shall require for admission at least a high school diploma or its equivalent and shall not offer programs or courses that are secular in nature. Additionally, to qualify as a bona fide religious postsecondary educational institution, an organization must meet each of the following criteria:

1. Be a non-profit institution owned, controlled, operated, and maintained by a bona fide church or religious denomination, lawfully operating as a non-profit religious corporation pursuant to Title 7 of the Colorado Revised Statutes.
2. Limit the educational program to the principles of that church or denomination and grant degrees or diplomas only in areas of study that contain on their face a reference to the theological or religious aspect of the degree's subject area. Institutions operating under this degree authorization shall not award degrees in any area of physical science or medicine; or degrees appropriate only for academic institutions; or degrees associated with specific professional fields or endeavors not clearly and directly related to religious studies or occupations.
3. Not market, offer, or grant degrees or diplomas which are represented as being linked to a church or denomination, but which actually are degrees in secular areas of study.
4. Have obtained exemption from property taxation under state law and shall have provided the Department a copy of the certificate of this exemption.

The Rocky Mountain School of Ministry & Theology is proposing to offer the following degree programs:

- Master of Arts in Biblical Studies
- Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
- Graduate Certificate in Biblical Studies

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

A representative from the Rocky Mountain School of Ministry & Theology and DHE staff have communicated regularly to assure the appropriate submission of documents. Staff has reviewed the documents submitted that meet the criteria for authorization as outlined in CCHE policy, Section I, Part J. Based on the School's vision and mission and the proposed programs, staff determined that the Rocky Mountain School of Ministry & Theology meets the definition of bona fide religious postsecondary educational institution (C.R.S. 23-2-102 (4)).

Statute does not require accreditation for Seminary or Religious Training Institutions as they provide education and training for work within religious organizations or they meet a personal need of an interested party. The state does not recognize degrees issued by institutions authorized under this provision of statute. The Department's role for institutions authorized under this status is to ensure that the institution offering postsecondary education under the auspice of religion is truly a bona fide religious postsecondary educational institution.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Commission approve authorization for the Rocky Mountain School of Ministry & Theology as a Seminary or religious training institution under the Degree Authorization Act.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

C.R.S. §23-2-103.3 (4) To operate in Colorado, a seminary or religious training institution shall apply for and receive authorization from the department and establish that it qualifies as a bona fide religious institution and as an institution of postsecondary education, as defined by rules promulgated by the commission. A seminary or religious training institution that meets the criteria and rules established by this subsection (4) is exempt from the provisions of subsections (1), (2), and (3) of this section. A bona fide religious institution and an institution of postsecondary education that applies for authorization pursuant to this subsection (4) shall pay the fee established according to [section 23-2-104.5](#).