For the past five years, Tiffin University (TU) has delivered high-quality associate’s degrees in the online format through Ivy Bridge College of Tiffin University. Most of the students are adults with busy lives who may not be able to access a college education through the traditional seated format. In fact, a majority of the students in our online associate’s degree programs are women with children and many of these women have jobs in addition to their family responsibilities. Survey responses have consistently indicated a high level of student satisfaction with the state-of-the-art online courses and the comprehensive student support services, including tutors, academic advisors, and success coaches. Students who wish to continue their education toward earning a bachelor’s degree may transfer to Tiffin University or to any other institution of higher education, including more than 150 colleges and universities that have signed articulation agreements guaranteeing admission for students who earn a Tiffin University associate’s degree delivered through our Ivy Bridge College.

Ivy Bridge College of Tiffin University began operating in 2008 as the result of a joint venture between the University and Altius Education, Inc. Tiffin University is fully in control of all aspects of the academic programs and the financial aid, registrar, bursar, academic tutoring, and library functions. The joint venture structure handles marketing, student recruitment, technology support, success coaching, and other services. Information describing the joint venture was sent by TU to officials of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in 2008 and in 2009, and TU did not receive any response from HLC.

In 2009, the self-study report that was submitted by TU to HLC as part of TU’s application for continuing accreditation included descriptions of Ivy Bridge College as an important component of TU. The HLC evaluation team that visited Tiffin in 2010 met with staff and faculty members who were involved with the online associate’s degree programs delivered through Ivy Bridge. The report of the HLC evaluation team included the following comments related to Ivy Bridge:

“It is evident that the University is embracing innovation and change with regard to on-line programs and Ivy Bridge entrepreneurial ventures.”

“The concept of the Ivy Bridge partnership is an excellent strategic initiative. It addresses an underserved population through a strong curriculum, efficient and effective academic support, excellent instruction, and a very good online portal for program delivery.”

“Ivy Bridge College delivers quality education to a relatively underserved population. Its staff support concept is innovative and well received by students.”

“Tiffin’s Ivy Bridge partnership and its European alliances are clear examples of using external relationships to further the mission of the University.”

“Team discussions with faculty indicated that they are dedicated professionals delivering a quality academic program. The faculty are committed to the concept and spirit of assessment of student learning and making ongoing curricular and pedagogical improvements.”

“TU effectively utilizes alliances/partnerships to develop and grow academic programs and to expand its local, national and global presence. These alliances have been particularly effective in the success of the online Associates Degree programs.”

“Students are generally satisfied with the concept, quality of faculty, and academic support.”

In 2010, the HLC Board of Trustees reviewed the report of the evaluation team and approved continuing accreditation for TU through 2020 without any concerns or comments about Ivy Bridge College of TU.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a competitive grant of $300,000 to Altius Education, Inc. for “breakthrough” online and blended academic programs which “significantly improve postsecondary access, persistence, completion and affordability, without compromising the quality of learning outcomes.” A recent article in **Forbes** described Ivy Bridge College of Tiffin University as “dedicated to providing an affordable higher education option that boosted the transfer rate of two-year students to four-year institutions”. Also, a recent article in **Inside Higher Education** observed that “the partnership between Tiffin and Altius had received praise from some who called it an innovative way for a small college to increase its online reach without sacrificing quality”.

HLC policies have changed in recent years, and Tiffin University was informed on July 24, 2013 by HLC officials that the business structure of the joint venture does not meet current HLC policies regarding partnerships. In response to HLC’s directives, the University discontinued admitting new students into Ivy Bridge College as of July 28th and will disengage from the partnership with Altius Education, Inc. by September 30th. All of the students will be able to complete their associate’s degrees through Tiffin University or apply for admission as transfer students into TU’s bachelor’s degree programs, which are offered in both the seated and online formats. Therefore, there will be no disruption for the students as they continue their college education. Also, Tiffin University continues to be fully accredited, so the credits earned by our students will continue to be fully transferrable to other colleges and universities if any student wishes to transfer to an institution other than Tiffin University.

Tiffin University will continue to offer bachelor’s and master’s degree programs in both the seated and online modalities, and associate’s degree programs will continue to be available in the seated format for students on the Tiffin campus. Also, TU may decide in the future to again deliver our associate’s degrees in the online format for new students.