

ACCREDITATION IS A PROCESS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. In the United States, accreditation is carried out by private, nonprofit organizations designed for this specific purpose.

Institutions and educational programs seek accredited status as a means of demonstrating their academic quality to students and the public and to become eligible for federal funds.

NUMBERS OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS¹

- 7,896 institutions are accredited
- 42,686 programs are accredited²

These institutions and programs are accredited by organizations recognized either by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or by organizations recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). CHEA or USDE “recognition” is a review of the quality and effectiveness of accrediting organizations based on the respective standards of CHEA or USDE.

Of the 7,896 institutions:

- 4,989 (63%) are degree-granting (associate degree and above)
- 2,907 (37%) are non-degree-granting
- 3,903 (49%) are nonprofit
- 3,722 (47%) are for-profit³

7,459 accredited institutions were certified to participate in the federal Title IV (Student Assistance) Program in 2013-2014. 2,039 of these institutions were public, 1,964 were private non-profit, and 3,680 were for-profit.⁴ If an institution participates in Title IV, students have the opportunity to apply for federal grants and loans to finance their education.

¹ CHEA *Almanac of External Quality Review 2013*. Numbers based on data from recognized accrediting organizations for 2012-2013.

² This number reflects a very large increase in accredited programs as compared to the 2011 *Almanac*. The primary cause of this increase is the change in reporting from several accreditors that reflects counting a program at each location at which it is offered, even if it is the same program. In addition, programmatic accrediting organizations were requested to provide the number of programs they accredited rather than the number of institutions that house the programs.

³ For 271 of the accredited institutions, the institutional control has not been indicated.

⁴ IPEDS Data Center, *Data Collection: 2013*, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/InstitutionByGroup.aspx>

TYPES AND NUMBERS OF RECOGNIZED ACCREDITORS

Types of Accreditors

Institutional

- *Regional:* Regional accreditors operate in six specific clusters of states (regions) in the United States and review entire institutions, 100 percent of which are degree-granting. There are 3,049 regionally accredited institutions.
- *National Faith-Related:* National faith-related accreditors operate nationally and review religiously affiliated or doctrinally based institutions, most of which are degree-granting and non-profit. There are 503 faith-related accredited institutions.
- *National Career-Related:* National career-related accreditors operate throughout the country and review entire institutions, 33 percent of which are degree-granting and 67 percent are non-degree-granting; 10.7 percent are non-profit and 83.1 percent are for-profit. There are 4,344 career institutions (for-profit and non-profit private and public). Many are single-purpose institutions focusing on, e.g., education in business and information technology.

Programmatic

- Programmatic accreditors operate throughout the country and review programs and some single-purpose institutions. There are 42,686 accredited programs.

In 2012-2013:

- 60 accreditors were recognized by CHEA.
- 52 accreditors were recognized by USDE.
- 27 of these accreditors were recognized by both USDE and CHEA.⁵

PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation serves the following purposes:

- *Assuring Quality.* Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure academic quality to students and the public.
- *Access to Federal Funds.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is required in order for students to gain access to federal funds such as student grants and loans and other federal support.
- *Easing Transfer.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities.
- *Engendering Private Sector Confidence.* Accredited status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and providing financial support to current employees seeking additional education. It is taken into account by corporations, foundations and individuals making private donations to higher education.

⁵ CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2013.

RECOGNITION PURPOSES AND STANDARDS⁶

CHEA and USDE each review the quality and effectiveness of accrediting organizations:

- CHEA's primary purpose is to assure and strengthen academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in courses, programs and degrees. CHEA's recognition is based on six standards that include, e.g., advancing academic quality and encouraging needed improvement.
- USDE's primary purpose is to assure that federal student aid funds are purchasing quality courses and programs. USDE's recognition is based on 10 standards that include attention to, e.g., recruitment and admission practices, fiscal and administrative capacity and facilities.

CHEA RECOGNITION STANDARDS

This language illustrates the recognition standards and is not the full or official CHEA policy statement. Please consult the 2010 CHEA *Recognition Policy and Procedures* at www.chea.org for the formal policy language that is used in CHEA recognition reviews. The CHEA recognition policy was adopted by the board of directors in September 1998 and revised in January 2006 and June 2010.

- *Advance academic quality.* Accreditors have a clear description of academic quality and clear expectations that the institutions or programs they accredit have processes to determine whether quality standards are being met.
- *Demonstrate accountability.* Accreditors have standards that call for institutions and programs to provide consistent, reliable information about academic quality and student achievement to foster continuing public confidence and investment.
- *Encourage, where appropriate, self-scrutiny and planning for change and needed improvement.* Accreditors encourage self-scrutiny for change and needed improvement through ongoing self-examination in institutions and programs.
- *Employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision making.* Accreditors maintain appropriate and fair organizational policies and procedures that include effective checks and balances.
- *Demonstrate ongoing review of accreditation practice.* Accreditors undertake self-scrutiny of their accrediting activities.
- *Possess sufficient resources.* Accreditors have and maintain predictable and stable resources.



⁶ Visit the CHEA Website at www.chea.org for additional information about the CHEA recognition standards and a list of CHEA accreditors. Visit the USDE Website at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation> for additional information about the USDE recognition standards and a list of recognized accreditors.

USDE RECOGNITION STANDARDS

Required Standards and their Application (as of July 30, 2015)⁷

602.16 Accreditation and preaccreditation standards.

- (a) The agency must demonstrate that it has standards for accreditation, and preaccreditation, if offered, that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. The agency meets this requirement if –
- (1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:
 - (i) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions and programs established by the institution, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination, and job placement rates.
 - (ii) Curricula.
 - (iii) Faculty.
 - (iv) Facilities, equipment, and supplies.
 - (v) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations.
 - (vi) Student support services.
 - (vii) Recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading, and advertising.
 - (viii) Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered.
 - (ix) Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency.
 - (x) Record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency.



A national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation, CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations.

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⁷ Source: Subpart C, 34 CFR Part 602; *The Secretary's Recognition of Accrediting Agencies*. USDE, Office of Postsecondary Education, January 2012. (<http://www2.ed.gov/adms/finaid/accred/agency-guidelines.pdf>)