I'm not robot

reCAPTCHA

Continue

I'm not robot

reCAPTCHA

Online colleges that don't require transcripts

Last updated: May 2020 What is accreditation? What is accreditation? This is one of the most common questions students ask when researching potential colleges. Accreditation is an objective endorsement of the quality of an educational institution. Accreditation, which is assigned to independent organizations and agencies, signals that the school meets strict academic standards and provides an important measure of public accountability, while guaranteeing that certifications, diplomas and degrees awarded by the institution have recognized value. Three types of accreditation apply to U.S. higher education institutions: regional, national and programmatic (or specialized). Regional accreditation typically signals the school's ideal status and academic focus, while institutions that offer technical, religious or vocational training typically hold national accreditation. Programmatic accreditation does not cover the school as a whole, instead acting as a recommendation of a school's special department or program. Two agencies play an important role in the accreditation process: the private Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the federal U.S. Department of Education (ED). These organizations recognize accreditation organizations and maintain searchable databases students and administrators can use to verify a school's accreditation position. Why accreditation matters Many students wonder why accreditation matters. They may not know that institutions have to work hard to earn accreditation. These recommendations carry weight and ensure that other accredited schools, both nationally and internationally, will recognize a student's credits and complete credentials. Many employers see accreditation in the same way and will only consider academic qualifications earned at accredited institutions. Moreover, accreditation standing can affect a student's ability to secure various forms of financial assistance. Federal loan programs are only available to students enrolled at accredited institutions recognized by authoritative agencies such as CHEA and ED. Similarly, many companies offer teaching assistance to employees who return to school to improve their academic credentials, but only if the student attends an accredited institution. Some employers further limit their offers to schools with regional accreditation, which is considered the most prestigious and authoritative type. Accreditation also affects a student's ability to transfer their credits between institutions. In most cases, accredited schools will not recognize coursework completed at an unaccredited institution. When assessing regional accreditation versus national accreditation, the regional form shows tangible benefits in this regard. Credits completed at regionally accredited schools have broader recognition, therefore transmits more easily. Most Most accreditation signals that a school meets high standards of academic quality determined through a rigorous peer review conducted by an independent agency. To obtain accreditation, an institution must complete a demanding, comprehensive testing process. In essence, it signals that a school is committed to an ongoing process of educational and academic improvement, as accreditations have limited lengths of term and remain subject to regular assessments for an institution to maintain its position. What to look for in accreditation When considering schools, prospective students should conduct careful, thorough research on the institution's accreditation position. Some institutions use shortcuts and questionable practices that allow them to require good accreditation standing despite not actually holding authoritative credentials. A decisive assessment concerns the accreditation commission or the agency. If ED doesn't recognize the accreditation body, a school's recommendations don't have much value. Most experts strongly recommend that students consider only schools with accreditations provided by ED-approved organizations. Schools not credited by CHEA and ED often make it difficult for students to ask questions or get help. Institutions that have verifiable, universally recognized accreditation make it easy to obtain information. If you find that your queries are being cycled around, derived, or left unaddressed, consider it a red flag. You also have reason to question a school or program that seems too good to be true. If a degree path requires far fewer credits than normal to complete, or if the institution highly proclaims its students can graduate in very short time frames, take a closer look at accreditation standing. Types of accreditation In most cases, regional and national endorsements apply to the entire school. But in some cases, these institutional accreditations only cover certain programs or degree paths. Reputable schools openly provide full details that explain their current accreditation standing and will make differences in their literature if they apply. Regional accreditation has a longer history than national accreditation and serves as a kind of gold standard. National accreditation evolved as a separate path for schools with a narrow or exclusive focus on technical, career-oriented or faith-based programs. Regional accreditors usually hold institutions to higher standards, and their endorsements usually carry greater prestige and utility. Institutional – National Usually, national accreditation signals that an institution is orienting itself towards a concentrated teaching area. Examples include career colleges that develop hard skills and religious institutions that provide theological training and education. Some national accreditation organizations include the Accreditation Commission Accreditation Commission Career schools and colleges and the Association of Biblical Higher Education. Unlike regional agencies, national accreditors operate throughout the United States, and their authority is not limited to specific geographic areas. Institutions with national accreditation typically offer affordable tuition fees and have impressive program completion rates. Graduates often go well on standardized certification and license surveys. However, these benefits come with some drawbacks. Because national accreditors tend to support schools with narrow, vocational and religious focus, credits cannot be transferred to institutions recognized by regional bodies or other national organizations. In other cases, students can only succeed in transferring a limited number of credits, and the transfer process may take longer to complete. Institutional – Regional Unlike their national counterparts, regional agencies primarily support institutions that focus on traditional academics rather than trade-based, vocational, career or religious training. Most observers agree that they use higher standards than most national bodies. Regional accreditors operate in limited jurisdictions, evaluate and approve institutions in their geographic purview. Regional accreditation has the most prestige and provides a far more reliable path to ensuring that other institutions will recognize course credits, certifications and degrees. Regional accreditation also makes it easier to secure funding from sources such as employer-based teaching programs. But regionally accredited schools typically cost more and typically impose higher admission standards. Seven regional agencies operate in the United States. While they work independently, each organisation also has membership in a collective known as the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, or C-RAC. About 3,000 U.S. institutions have the support of C-RAC members. Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Micronesia, Palau and northern Mariana (and some schools in Asia) Higher Learning Commission Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia and Wyoming Middle States Commission on Higher Education New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland , District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands New England Commission of Higher Education Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, and some international institutions Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and the Washington state Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia WASC Senior College and University Commission California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Micronesia, Palau and the Northern Mariana Islands (in addition to certain schools in Asia) Specialized or programmatic accredited online schools and campus-based programs may also have a third type of support known as programmatic or specialized accreditation. This class of credentials applies to specific programs or academic departments in an accredited institution instead of the college or university itself. This accreditation is an optional additional level of quality assurance that signals that the approved program or department meets higher than normal standards of professional excellence. In most cases, specialized accreditation applies to programs and departments that offer study opportunities that lead to license or high-profile professional designations. Two common examples are nursing and business administration. The best nursing schools often have the support of organisations such as the Commission for Collegiate Nursing Education and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing. Meanwhile, organizations such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the International Accreditation Council for Business Education are giving additional prestige to the MBA and other business programs that seek to differentiate themselves in a crowded field. Specialized accreditors confirm programs in other academic disciplines, including engineering, graphic design, computer science and social work. Some paradigms also include online accreditation, such as recommendations from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), as another type of specialized authorization. Accredited online schools recognized by DEAC offer distance-based programs that meet particularly high quality standards. Established in 1926 as the National Home Study Council, Deac developed into an ED-recognized national accreditor in 1959. With online learning having essentially replaced correspondence-based models, DEAC now largely works with schools and programs that primarily deliver courses online. How does accreditation work? One of the main reasons accreditation is important stems from the thorough process institutions must complete to earn it. Although details vary between accreditation agencies, typical timelines cover years, not months. In most cases, an institution's journey from candidacy to formalized accreditation takes at least 12-18 months. For some specialized recommendations, the process can stretch as long as five years. The requirements also vary from one accreditor to the next. But at a minimum, schools must show that their programs comply with standards of rigor and quality in accordance with those seen in comparable accredited institutions. Candidate institutes must also be evidence of economic and academic integrity and demonstrates that they have developed and implemented internal quality control standards designed to continuously improve learning outcomes. In most cases, institutional accreditations extend to online programs at campus-based colleges. Fully online schools follow a slightly different process, as explained in the subsees below. Eligibility requirements National, regional and specialized accreditation bodies use their own standards when evaluating applicants. Some agencies use more lax criteria, while others maintain inflexible, demanding standards that institutions and programs have to work hard to meet. Regardless of differences in specific standards, all ED-recognized accreditors use some common criteria: Applicants must meet the accreditation body's eligibility guidelines, which define clear standards of academic integrity and quality. Accreditors also impose external supervision mechanisms such as peer review and website visits to ensure compliance and objectivity. As an example, consider the core values and principles used by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), a C-RAC member agency. SACSCOC requires institutions to meet their standards in seven key areas: 1. Programs must be demonstrable to comply with and promote the stated educational mission of the candidate institution, as expressed in writing and submitted to SACS during the application process. 2. Institutions must demonstrate financial and academic integrity, and maintain an internal board with the authority and freedom to make and implement policies and operational decisions. 3. All programs must undergo regular evaluation to ensure that they remain current and relevant. 4. The school environment must support ethnic, cultural and racial diversity. 5. Institutions must generate sufficient financial resources to maintain operations fully. 6. Schools must provide students with the necessary support resources, such as professional advice and career services. 7. Administrators must use internal quality control protocols to continuously improve students' learning outcomes. For comparison, consider the eligibility standards maintained by DEAC. In addition to assessing an applicant's financial integrity, solvency and governance, DEAC also requires institutions to show that managers have good ethics, which may include personal and professional background checks. In addition, when considering private schools, DEAC expects applicants to show stable ownership that has been in place for at least two consecutive calendar years. Self-evaluation accreditation agencies require that institutions applying for membership complete an internally supervised self-evaluation. As with other aspects of the process, the details of this step vary slightly among accreditors with each body maintaining its own unique evaluation calculations. In general, self-evaluations involve a thorough, data-based analysis of the school's strengths, areas of improvement, learning outcomes and student and faculty performance. Candidate institutions appoint committees to conduct self-evaluation. To illustrate, consider WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) committee guidelines. The WSCUC proposes that the schools involve senior managers and administrative leaders, permanent and adjacent faculty members, student government officials, support staff, administrative personnel and members of governing boards of committees. Early in the process, committees can join accreditation workshops. These sessions are offered by accreditation agencies, giving candidates the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the accreditor's standards and evaluation processes, as well as learn from the experiences of other schools. Timelines for the full completion of the self-evaluation step vary. Smaller schools usually complete it in a few months, while larger schools can take an entire academic year. Online schools follow a similar process of conducting self-evaluations. This process phase ends when the institution completes a formal self-evaluation report (SER). Sers provides a comprehensive presentation of the collected data, covering all aspects of the school's history, organization, economic and administrative management, academic structure, educational goals, learning outcomes and achievements. Application and emergency assessment schools send formal applications to accreditation agencies, signaling their desire to earn support. The order in which the steps in the process unfold varies between accreditors, but as an example consider standards followed by the Accreditation Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC). ACCSC divides the application process into two phases. In phase one, candidate institutions participate in an accreditation workshop and submit an initial application (together with an application fee) within six months. At this stage, the ACCSC is also asking for a revised financial statement, which the committee is reviewing. If a candidate institution passes the first stage, it proceeds to phase two, which includes the first self-evaluation and an orientation session. The ACCSC may also request additional supplemental documentation such as specialized reports on graduation rates, student achievement, or other technical aspects of institutional performance. Other accreditors work differently, especially with regard to online schools. For example, after accepting an initial application from a qualified school, DEAC gives candidate institutions one year to submit their self-assessment. Assuming the acceptance of the self-evaluation, DEAC then moves on to a step unique to online schools known as the emergency assessment. During the assessment, DEAC appoints a representative to guide the online school as it reads for a full website evaluation. This representative assesses the completeness and suitability of the institution's self-evaluation, informs the institution of the steps involved in the evaluation of the website, and offers preparation guidelines and proposals. If DEAC evaluators decide that the school is not yet ready, it will provide specific points of commented feedback and encourage the school to address them before they re-enthror. Timelines vary between accreditors, but typical expectations add 1-3 months to the usual SER completion duration. Institutions whose first applications do not succeed usually must repeat the application process in full. Curriculum Review and third-party assessment online schools typically undergo an additional series of steps covering a comprehensive curriculum review and third-party assessment. During the curriculum review, representatives of the accreditation agency conduct assessments of school programs and courses, evaluate their rigor and quality and determine whether they accurately reflect institutional goals. They also evaluate faculty, research initiatives and the school's financial resources. Some agencies are also reviewing student-submitted investigations. As an additional check, the curriculum review usually remains subject to a third-party assessment in which another independent evaluator audits the first representative's findings. This quality assurance step provides important authentication and protects the integrity of the accreditation process. On-site evaluation EvaluationA on site allows accreditors to assess factors that are difficult to judge solely through written application materials. Agencies typically schedule these sessions instead of making surprise visits. Accreditation agencies maintain varying guidelines for the size of their evaluation teams, but they always consist of multiple representatives. Typically, 2-6 agency members participate, including at least one senior administrator. Peer readers and third-party experts may also receive invitations to join the evaluation team. Prior to the on-site evaluation, the accreditation agency will usually submit a list of representatives who will complete the visit, along with a list of individual faculty members or administrators they wish to meet during their stay. For traditional campus-based schools as well as online institutions, evaluations consist of intensive meetings covering introductions, program reviews, interviews with key faculty members and administrators, and daily closings. The school's main contact can also participate in individual interview sessions with evaluators before a final conclusion ends the visit. On-site evaluations include visits to facilities such as classrooms, research laboratories, libraries, and other important operating assets. For unique online schools, evaluators focus on whether the school's facilities accurately reflect the standards presented in written application materials. If a school does not meet accreditor standards, the agency can submit a list of changes and corrections the institution must implement. Depending on the extent to which the school came up short, accreditors can schedule a follow-up visit to observe the requested corrections or redirect the institution back to the initial application process after it has adopted the necessary changes. Publishing and maintaining accreditation As a means of signaling a pending accreditation decision, institutions sometimes indicate that they have pre-accreditation status. This means that the school has opened an active accreditation application, but does not necessarily signal the impending arrival of a positive decision. If the candidate institution's accreditation application succeeds, the accreditation agency will inform school administrators in writing. At this stage, the accreditator will also specify the formalities of the accreditation publication process. In some cases, schools will receive approval to publish their accreditation status immediately. In others, the accreditor will impose a short delay to facilitate the complete dissolution of all administrative loose ends. Prospective students and other interested parties can usually find a school's accreditation status by conducting a targeted

search on the institution's website or with a general internet search engine. Many schools have dedicated accreditation tabs in their navigation headlines, making this information easy to find. As a general rule of thumb, institutions that make it difficult for visitors to find accreditation information often have questionable status. In most cases, regional and national accreditation is still valid for a five-year or 10-year period. Institutions must undergo reevaluation to maintain their accreditation status, which typically occurs a year or two before the scheduled expiration of the current approval. The Higher Learning Commission also maintains a policy that ensures member institutions will not face reevaluation within four years of their initial confirmation. When applying to maintain existing accreditations, schools must show their compliance with obligations standards, submit a formal institutional update, and provide requested interim reports covering such aspects as registration, governance and financial position. Institutions must also notify the accreditation of any material changes in the organization or operations. In case of major changes, accreditors can make supplementary visits to the site. Failure to fulfil the institution's stated obligations or non-compliance with acceptable standards may result in a loses its accreditation status. Status. Status.