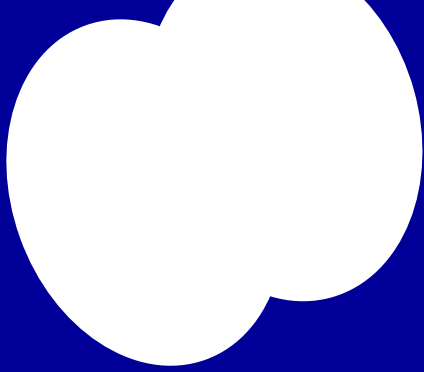




# Overview

Quality Assurance System  
in Higher Education

**UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA**

Second edition (2016)

Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education  
United States of America

First edition published in March 2010

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**NIAD-UE**  
**January 2016**

PDF file available at: [http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/overview\\_us2\\_e.pdf](http://www.niad.ac.jp/english/overview_us2_e.pdf)

## Introduction

In addition to its core activities of university evaluation, awarding of degrees and research activities, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) is working closely with domestic and overseas quality assurance agencies, including those having advanced higher education systems and close ties with Japan, to gain the trust of the international community in Japanese higher education and promote international collaboration among higher education institutions (HEIs).

As each country possesses different political, societal, cultural and language element, the structure of its quality assurance system for higher education also differs. In building relationships and realizing effective cooperation that transcend such barriers, ‘mutual understanding’ must first be enhanced among cooperating organizations by exchanging accurate information on their respective quality assurance and higher education systems. This mindset is important when HELs provide an effectively quality-assured collaborative program.

In this context, International Affairs Division of NIAD-UE has developed the ‘Information Package’ as a means for publishing comprehensive information on higher education and quality assurance systems in Japan and other countries. We have so far compiled information of Japan, United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, France, Korea, China, and Germany.

Unlike most countries, the U.S. has no centralized “Ministry of Education” to enforce national standards. While academic autonomy is widely practiced, formal, official oversight is performed by the federal government, states and accreditors. The federal government recognizes accreditors through whose accreditation the quality of higher education institutions is assured. State governments, in the meantime, review institutions for state licensure and/or state authority to operate. Also, state-owned institutions are dependent on state legislatures for their funding. Accreditation was originally begun as a voluntary activity among higher education institutions and is still be considered to be a reliable authority on academic quality by federal and state governments. Quality assurance in the U.S. higher education, thus, consists of activities by those three players (i.e. the federal government, states and accreditors) which are often referred to as “triad”.

This “Overview” was based on a variety of information regarding higher education and quality assurance in higher education in the United States. First published in 2010, it has been revised with the latest data and trend as “**Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education: the United States of America (second edition)**” in both English and Japanese. The newest edition is based on desk research conducted between 2014 and 2015.

Upon completion of the document, we would like to thank everyone who gave us useful comments and suggestions. Especially the biggest thanks to Ms. Linda Suskie, the former vice president of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, who made the content a lot better with her broad knowledge and cheerful comments.

January 2016

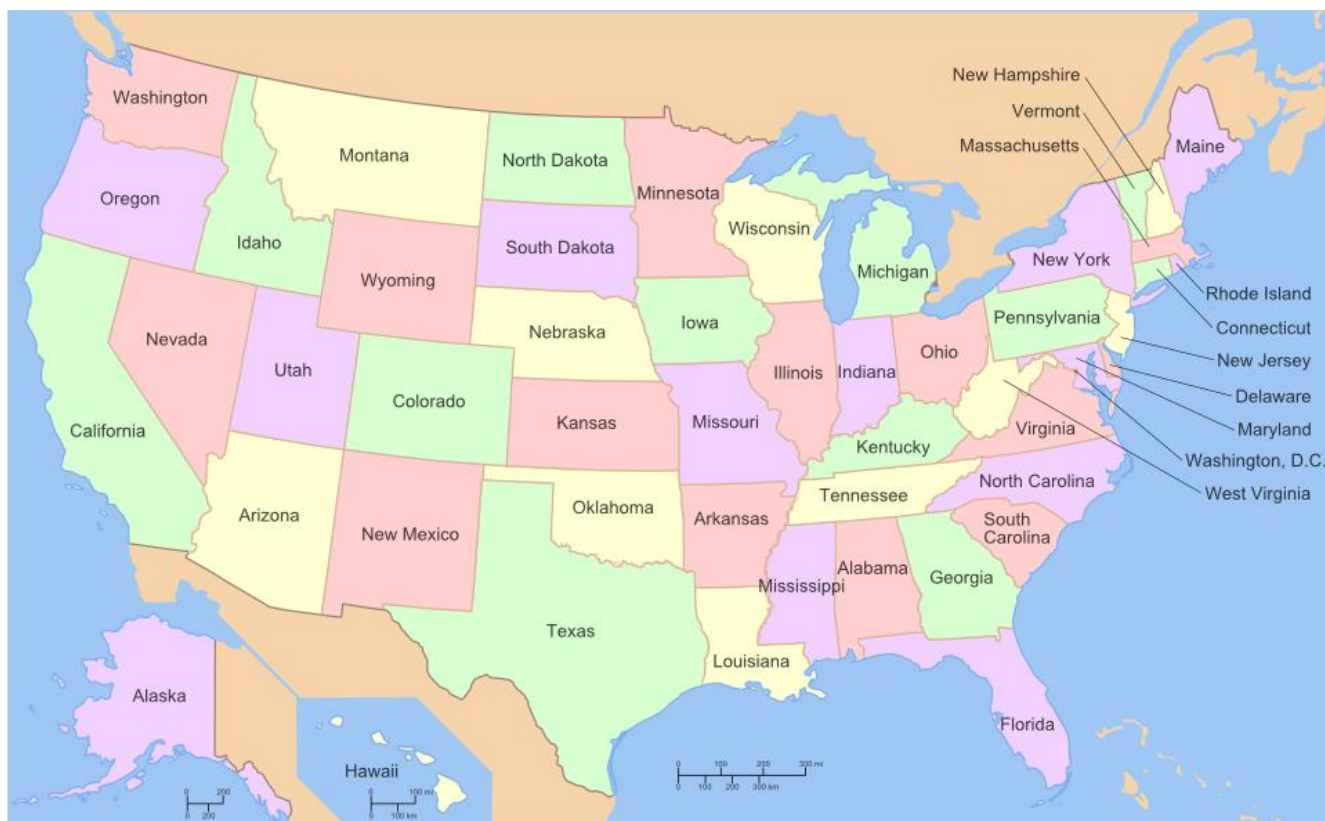
National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation



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## Map of the United States of America



Reference:

- Wikimedia Commons (2015) Map of USA with state names 2,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map\\_of\\_USA\\_with\\_state\\_names.svg#/media/File:Map\\_of\\_USA\\_with\\_state\\_names\\_2.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_USA_with_state_names.svg#/media/File:Map_of_USA_with_state_names_2.svg) [30 Oct 2015]

## I. Basic information of the country

|                                                                                 |                                                                                            |                                |                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Name of country/region                                                          | United States of America                                                                   |                                |  |
| Capital                                                                         | Washington D.C.                                                                            |                                |                                                                                     |
| Major language                                                                  | English                                                                                    |                                |                                                                                     |
| Population (Dec 2015)                                                           | 321,368,864                                                                                |                                |                                                                                     |
| Nominal GDP (2013)                                                              | 16,776,800,000,000 USD                                                                     |                                |                                                                                     |
| Nominal GDP per capita (2013)                                                   | 53,101 USD                                                                                 |                                |                                                                                     |
| Public expenditure on education as a % of total public expenditure (2011)       | All levels of education: 13.6% (12.9%), Tertiary education: 3.5% (3.2%)<br>(OECD averages) |                                |                                                                                     |
| Public expenditure on education as a % of GDP (2011)                            | All levels of education: 5.1% (5.6%), Tertiary education: 1.3% (1.4%)<br>(OECD averages)   |                                |                                                                                     |
| Annual expenditure per student in tertiary education (2011)                     | by educational institutions<br>26,021 USD                                                  | by the government<br>9,057 USD |                                                                                     |
| Estimated annual average tuition fees (1 <sup>st</sup> degree programmes, 2011) | 5,402 USD (Public institutions)<br>17,163 USD (Independent private institutions)           |                                |                                                                                     |
| Progression rate into higher education (2010)                                   | 74%<br>(incl. both full-time and part-time students in two- and four-year institutions)    |                                |                                                                                     |
| Organization of education system                                                | See II-2 Diagram of the educational system                                                 |                                |                                                                                     |
| Cycle of academic year                                                          | September to May/June                                                                      |                                |                                                                                     |

### Sources:

- EP Nuffic (2013) Country module - United States, Jan 2013, Available: <http://www.nuffic.nl/en/library/country-module-united-states.pdf> [30 Mar 2015] p. 4
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) アメリカ合衆国 (United States of America) 基礎データ, 11 Sep 2014, Available: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/data.html> [30 Mar 2015]
- OECD (2014) *Education at a Glance 2014: IECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Available: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf> [20 Apr 2015], pp. 215, 249, 257, 271
- U.S. Census Bureau for the United States (2015) U.S. and World Population Clock, Available: <http://www.census.gov/popclock/> [3 Dec 2015]

## II. The higher education system

### 1. Historical overview of U.S. higher education

During the colonial era, the colleges, e.g. Harvard (founded in 1636), William and Mary (1693), and Yale (1701), were established as adjuncts of their respective churches, which meant facility with classical language, grounding in the basic philosophies of Aristotle, and a smattering of general worldly knowledge. The curriculum of the colleges in this era aimed to provide students with a liberal education. The founding documents of all three schools speak to the aim of educating ministers.

In the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the U.S. independence, the newly sovereign states made provision for collegiate education for their citizens. States that had no colleges chartered new institutions. The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 allowed many states to receive land to build colleges to help promote economic and civic development in the states.

The balance of postsecondary study in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century comprised several types: the groups of colleges and universities to be engaged in higher learning, e.g., private liberal arts colleges, public research universities which developed under the Morrill Act, state normal schools which nurture elementary and secondary school teachers, and seminaries which prepared priests or ministers. Another important development was what is now called the Historically Black College or University (HBCU). They were founded by states and religious denominations for African-Americans who could not attend many colleges because of segregation.

During 1920s, an expansion in enrollments triggered quantitative changes analogous to what Martin Trow would later identify as the transition from elite to mass higher education. The period between 1945 and 1975 was the most expansive in the American experience (1950: 2.7 million students; 1960: 3.6 million; 1970: 7.9 million). After World War II, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill) made access to higher education a national priority. In the 1960s and 1970s, the launching and rapid growth of community colleges, offering two-year associate's degrees to local residents, further expanded postsecondary education opportunities.

Higher education's relationship with the federal government changed in these years. The federal investment in higher education increased significantly in the 1970s, with the new funds being used to support student access through grants and loans to students. Direct support for research remained at high levels, and, eventually, expanded once more in the 1980s.

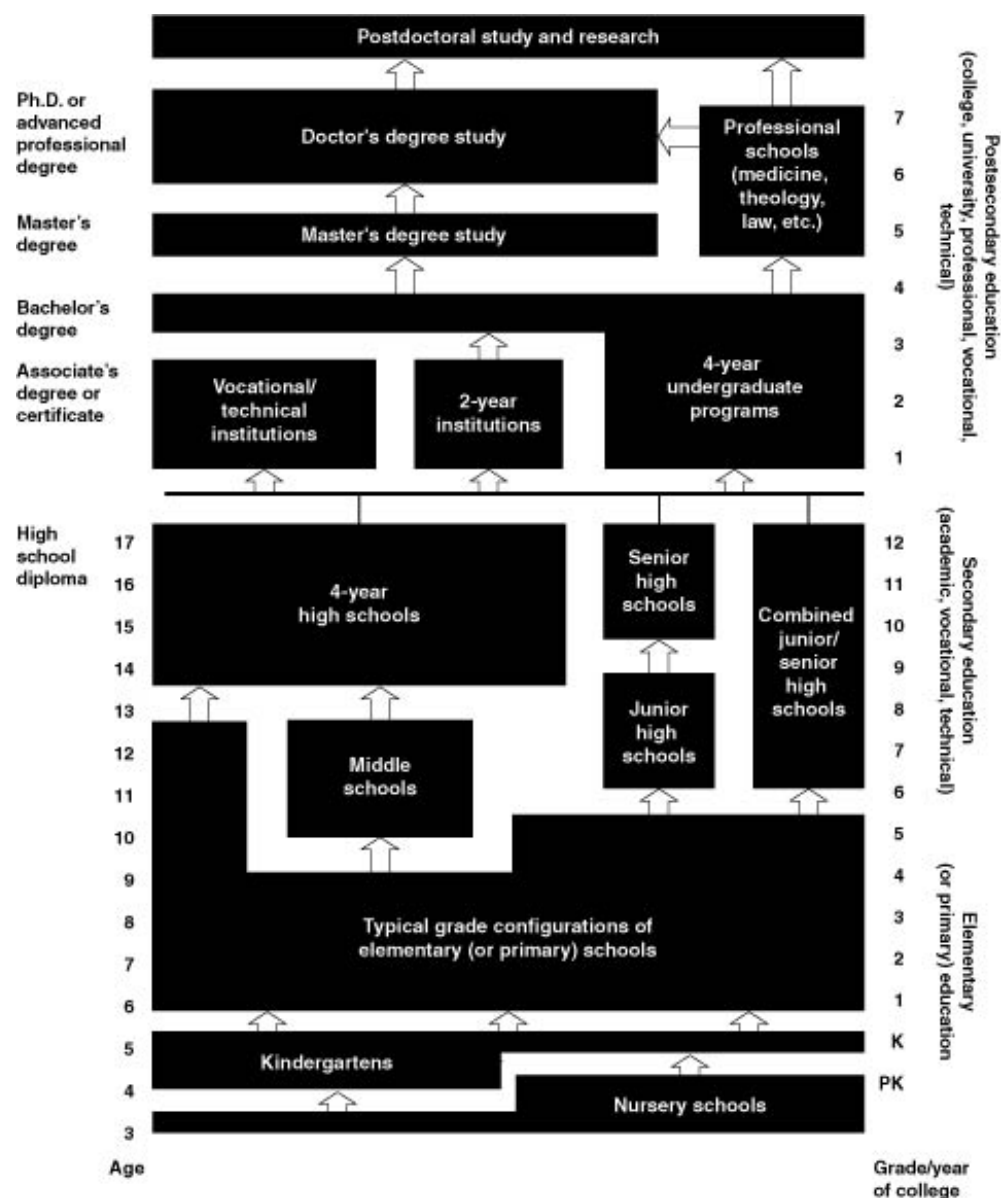
Higher education is highly diversified in the 21st century from public to private, four-year to two-year, not-for-profit to for-profit institutions. In the meantime, more than sixty percent of students enrolled are now over twenty-five years old and an approximately same proportion is also working full-time; compared to a

traditional model of full-time students between eighteen and twenty-three years old entering directly after secondary school. Such a situation reflects an increasing demand for middle-skill jobs which require more than a high school diploma. Furthermore, as many state budgets strain under debt loads, states' reduction on their support to colleges and universities has triggered a trend of rising costs of higher education for individuals; including those of textbooks and tuition.

Sources:

- Altbach, P.G., Gumport, P.J. and Berdahl, R.O. (1998) *American Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp.39-43, 57, 64
- Ewell, P.T. (2008) *U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance: A Tenth Anniversary Report from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation*, Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, pp.17-21, 28, 48
- Staley, D.J. & Trinkle, D.A. (2011) *The Changing Landscape of Higher Education*, Educause review, Available: <http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/changing-landscape-higher-education> [24 Mar 2015]

## 2. Diagram of the educational system in the United States of America



Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2012) *Digest of Education Statistics: 2012*, Available: [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/figures/fig\\_01.asp?referrer=figures](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/figures/fig_01.asp?referrer=figures) [30 Mar 2015]



### 3. Type and size of higher education institutions

#### Types of higher education institutions

Higher education institutions are divided into either public or private. Private institutions consist of non-profit and for-profit entities. Whereas, those institutions can also be divided into two-year and four-year institutions; the former mainly provide less-than-degree programs and the latter degree programs. There are vocational institutions called career schools majority of which are for-profit organizations.

Higher education institutions in the United States are organized and licensed or chartered as not-for-profit or for-profit corporations, regardless of whether they are public or private. These corporate entities are governed by boards of trustees, who are citizens appointed by a governor or legislature (public institutions) or elected by the board itself (private institutions).

Public institutions, in addition to having governing boards typically appointed by state authorities, will also receive some annual allocation of state budget funds.

Private institutions are independent of state control even though they are licensed or authorized by state governments. They may be non-profit or for-profit, and may be secular or affiliated with a religious community. Some private institutions may be authorized by state governments to receive state operating funds and to provide some public services.

Source:

- Eckel, P.D. & King, J.E. (2004) *An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access, and the Role of the Marketplace*, Washington DC: American Council on Education, Available: <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity-Access-and-the-Role-of-the-Marketplace-2004.pdf> [11 Mar 2015] pp.1-2
- International Affairs Office (2008) Organization of U.S. Education: Tertiary Institutions, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec-inst.doc> [30 Mar 2015]
- U.S. Department of Education (2015) Types of Schools, Available: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/prepare-for-college/choosing-schools/types#career-schools> [24 Feb 2015]

#### Number of institutions

|                    | Public | Private not-for-profit | Private for-profit | Total | Private (%) |
|--------------------|--------|------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------------|
| Four-year          | 706    | 1,645                  | 827                | 3,178 | 77.8        |
| Two-year           | 1,038  | 172                    | 1,071              | 2,281 | 54.5        |
| Less-than two-year | 267    | 86                     | 1,707              | 2,060 | 87.0        |
| Total              | 2,011  | 1,903                  | 3,605              | 7,519 | 73.3        |

2013/14, institutions located in U.S. only

Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2015) IPEDS Data Center, Available: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> [11 Mar 2015]



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### Number of enrollments

|                    | Public     | Private not-for-profit | Private for-profit | Total      | Private (%) |
|--------------------|------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| Four-year          | 8,078,482  | 3,936,065              | 1,310,203          | 13,324,750 | 39.4        |
| Two-year           | 6,608,918  | 41,119                 | 370,801            | 7,020,838  | 5.9         |
| Less-than two-year | 56,727     | 11,901                 | 255,486            | 324,114    | 82.5        |
| Total              | 14,744,127 | 3,989,085              | 1,936,490          | 20,669,702 | 28.7        |

Fall 2013, full-time and part-time, estimated, institutions located in U.S. only

Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2015) IPEDS Data Center, Available: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> [11 Mar 2015]

### Percentage of full-time enrollments from all enrollments

|                    | Public | Private not-for-profit | Private for-profit | Total |
|--------------------|--------|------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| Four-year          | 73.4   | 75.4                   | 62.5               | 72.9  |
| Two-year           | 39.2   | 78.4                   | 89.5               | 42.1  |
| Less-than two-year | 51.6   | 89.8                   | 82.7               | 77.6  |
| Total              | 58.0   | 75.5                   | 70.3               | 62.5  |

Fall 2013, institutions located in U.S. only

Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2015) IPEDS Data Center, Available: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> [11 Mar 2015]

### Number of employees (full-time and part-time)

|                    | Public    | Private not-for-profit | Private for-profit | Total     |
|--------------------|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Four-year          | 1,588,783 | 1,081,221              | 166,464            | 2,836,468 |
| Two-year           | 647,059   | 7,846                  | 57,827             | 712,732   |
| Less-than two-year | 12,819    | 1,922                  | 37,940             | 52,681    |
| Total              | 2,248,661 | 1,090,989              | 262,231            | 3,601,881 |

Fall 2013, institutions located in U.S. only

Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2015) IPEDS Data Center, Available: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> [11 Mar 2015]

## 4. Student admission

The U.S. higher education includes institutions with a wide range of admission selectivity, from open-access institutions that admit all students, to highly selective research universities and liberal arts colleges that admit only a small fraction of applicants. Admissions decisions at selective institutions are based on a set of academic criteria, including high school coursework, grade point average and class rank, and admissions test score, as well as a more flexible set of non-academic characteristics, such as demonstrated leadership ability, creativity, and community service. The admissions decisions at highly selective institutions are so complex and consider so many factors. Because the U.S. has no national secondary school curriculum or high school exit examination, some institutions consider either of two privately developed admissions examinations – the SAT (Scholastic

Assessment Test) and ACT (American College Test).

Source:

- Eckel, P.D. & King, J.E. (2004) *An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access, and the Role of the Marketplace*, Washington DC: American Council on Education, Available: <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity-Access-and-the-Role-of-the-Marketplace-2004.pdf> [11 Mar 2015] p. 8

## 5. Higher education credentials

### Non-degree credentials

#### Certificate

Certificates are awarded upon the successful completion of a brief course of study, usually one year or less but at times longer, primarily in public or private two-year institutions of higher education, university extension programs or non-degree granting postsecondary institutions like area career and technical education schools. Some certificates are issued beyond pre-baccalaureate level, at post-baccalaureate and post-master levels.

National Center for Education Statistics defines certificates into three categories (NCES, 2012). Short-term credentials are issued after completion of programs less than 1 academic year; less than 900 clock hours, less than 30 semester credit hours, or less than 45 quarter credit hours. Programs that last at least 1 but less than 2 academic years, i.e. at least 900 but less than 1,800 clock hours, at least 30 but less than 60 semester credit hours, or at least 45 but less than 90 quarter hours, issue moderate-term credentials. The other category, long-term credentials, are issued after programs at least 2 but less than 4 academic years; 1,800 or more clock hours, 60 or more semester credit hours, or 90 or more quarter hours.

#### Certification

Certifications are different from certificates. They indicate mastery of or competency in specific knowledge, skills or processes that can be measured against a set of accepted standards. These are not tied to a specific educational program, but are typically awarded through assessment and validation of skills in cooperation with a business, trade association or other industry group. After attaining a certification, individuals often must meet ongoing requirements to maintain the currency of the certification.

#### License

A license is legal permission, typically granted by a government agency, to allow an individual to perform certain regulated tasks or occupations. A license can be obtained by meeting certain requirements set forth by the licenser, usually by completing a course of education and/or assessments. Upon receipt of a license, ongoing requirements may be necessary to maintain the license.

#### Intermediate Graduate Qualifications

The U.S. higher education system awards several qualifications that represent studies and research beyond the master's degree but that are not the equivalent of a research doctorate. Most of these qualifications are in



professional fields of study and represent a level of education corresponding to advanced professional standing.

## Degrees

### Associate Degree

The associate degree can be awarded in academic or professional subjects and also in terminal career and technical programs. Two-year colleges (community colleges) and a small number of four-year institutions grant associate degrees. Associate degrees may represent a terminal degree in a vocational field or may prepare students to complete a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. Credits earned in associate degree programs can be transferred to bachelor's degree programs under certain conditions. The transfer of credits from associate degree programs to bachelor's degree programs are usually governed by what are called articulation agreements between institutions.

NCES defines an associate degree as “an award that normally requires at least 2 but less than 4 years of full-time equivalent college work” (NCES, 2015). Unlike certificate and diploma programs, an associate degree is a recognized higher education degree.

Most associate degrees earned in academic programs are Associate of Arts (AA) or Science (AS) degrees. Another common associate degree is the Associate of Applied Science (AAS), which has a stronger career/vocational emphasis than AA/AS degrees but is generally transferrable to a bachelor's program. The Associate of Occupational Science (AOS) degrees are less common and have the strongest career/vocational emphasis. AOS is typically designed not to be transferrable to a bachelor's program.

### Bachelor's Degree

U.S. bachelor's degrees are usually planned to take 4 academic years of full-time study to complete. However, some degrees take longer to complete, including those in engineering, architecture and other fields. The bachelor's degree may be defined as an award “that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work...Also includes bachelor's degrees in which the normal 4 years of work are completed in 3 years.” (NCES, 2015)

U.S. bachelor degree programs usually include requirements for breadth as well as depth of study, and students will fulfill what are called liberal or general studies requirements for introductory knowledge in several subjects as well as a concentration in one or more subjects, called a major.

U.S. educators and employers believe strongly that the bachelor's degree should prepare students for entry-level jobs as well as for possible advanced study. Whether students continue their studies or enter the labor market, they will need to understand the basic principles of fields other than their own narrow specialization, and they will need skills – such as languages, IT and computational skills – that cannot be obtained exclusively in their major field. This extra knowledge and skill must be obtained at the higher

education level. And the degree program should be structured so that the additional knowledge and skill complements the main subject concentration.

Most bachelor's degrees are titled Bachelor of Arts (BA or AB) or Bachelor of Science (BS or SB), but there are many other bachelor's degree titles in use.

Honors bachelor's degrees are awarded by some institutions and involve more independent study or a different curriculum, require a thesis or special project, and may have special admissions requirements.

A number of U.S. higher education institutions offer programs that permit a student to earn a specialized certificate (it can also be called a diploma) at the same time the bachelor's degree is earned or shortly thereafter. Post-bachelor's certificates usually require no more than a single academic year to complete, and are often completed as part of the degree program.

### Master's Degrees

The master's degree is the first graduate-level qualification, or second cycle degree, in the U.S. higher education system. Master's degrees generally take two years to complete, but the time period may be shorter or longer depending on how the degree program is structured, whether the student is enrolled full-time or part-time, the degree requirements and the prior preparation of the student.

The most common academic master's degrees are the Master of Arts (MA or AM) and Master of Science (MS or SM). However, there are many different master's degree titles, especially in the professional fields.

Master's degrees awarded in academic fields are generally research degrees that require the completion of required graduate-level courses and seminars, passing comprehensive examinations in the major subfield of research and usually one or more minor subfields, and the preparation and defense of a master's thesis under faculty supervision.

Master's degrees awarded in professional fields may be structured as research degrees (as in engineering, for example), or they may be structured specifically to prepare students to work in an applied professional field at an advanced level (as with the MBA).

### Doctoral Degrees

The research doctorate, or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and its equivalent titles, represents the highest academic qualification in the U.S. education system. U.S. doctorates are structured programs of advanced study and supervised research. Students admitted to doctoral programs must complete all qualifying graduate-level coursework and participate in doctoral seminars and colloquia. Students who complete these preliminary requirements at a satisfactory level (usually an A average grade is required) must then pass written comprehensive examinations that cover their chosen research specialization plus two or more adjunct

specialties, one of which is often in a related subject area. Successful students who pass the examinations and receive the recommendation of the doctoral faculty are advanced to candidacy for the doctorate.

The doctoral candidate selects a doctoral dissertation advisor and doctoral committee. The advisor and committee approve the dissertation research proposal and are available to advise on the progress of the independent research program. When the candidate and the advisor judge that the research is completed and the dissertation is finished, the candidate is scheduled for a public oral examination defending the dissertation. At the conclusion of the oral defense, the dissertation committee votes on whether to award the doctorate and sign the dissertation, which is then published in print and/or electronically and made available for the academic community.

### First-Professional degrees

First-professional degrees represent a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system.

A first-professional degree is an award that requires completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 2 years of college work prior to entering the program; and (3) a total of at least 6 academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself. First-professional degrees may be awarded in 10 fields including Chiropractic, Medicine, Jurisprudence, and Divinity.

### Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)

NB: Many countries have established national qualifications framework which describes what holders of a particular level of qualifications should commonly have (learning outcomes) to classify qualifications into different levels. While there is no such framework in the United States, a project called DQP has started to define learning outcomes for degrees.

The Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) outlines a set of reference points for what students should know and be able to do upon completion of associate, bachelor's and master's degrees in any field of study. It is developed by National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)\*, the Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC)\*, and the Lumina Foundation\*. There are five broad categories of proficiencies which provide a profile of what degrees mean in terms of specific learning outcomes. The DQP, on a voluntary basis, invites adaptation within the context of varied institutional missions. More than 400 colleges and universities that have experimented with the DQP have already taken action on many of these applications. Case studies of those institutions are shared on the DQP's website (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

### Five categories of learning

- ✓ Specialized knowledge: proficiencies involving terminology, theory, methods, tools, literature, complex problems or applications and cognizance of limits;

- ✓ Broad and integrative knowledge: exploring, connecting and applying concepts and methods across multiple fields of study;
- ✓ Intellectual skills: proficiencies transcending the boundaries of particular fields of study;
- ✓ Applied and collaborative learning: what graduates can do with what they know;
- ✓ Civic and global learning: preparing graduates for knowledgeable and responsible participation.

NILOA: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment

Established in 2008, the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) assists institutions and others in discovering and adopting promising practices in the assessment of college student learning outcomes. NILOA's primary objective is to discover and disseminate ways that academic programs and institutions can productively use assessment data internally to inform and strengthen undergraduate education, and externally to communicate with policy makers, families and other stakeholders.

IEBC: Institute for Evidence-based Change

The nonprofit Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) is focused on improving educational practice by helping education stakeholders use data and information to make informed decisions and increase student success.

Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is the nation's largest private foundation focused solely on increasing Americans' success in higher education. Lumina Foundation strives to help people achieve their potential by expanding access to and success in education beyond high school and is committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025.

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- Eckel, P.D. & King, J.E. (2004) *An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access, and the Role of the Marketplace*, Washington DC: American Council on Education, Available: <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity-Access-and-the-Role-of-the-Marketplace-2004.pdf> [11 Mar 2015] p. 9
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## 6. Federal and local governments

The U.S. federal government does not have much direct authority over U.S. education. The Constitution does not mention education as a general responsibility and the federal government plays a limited role. In fact, the U.S. had never had an education ministry until the U.S. Department of Education was established in 1980.

Public and private higher education institutions enjoy more autonomy and are more internally self-governing than are schools. Nevertheless, state governments exercise oversight and coordinating authority over higher





education within their jurisdictions, issue corporate charters to institutions, regulate standards and quality to varying degrees, and may have regulatory authority over various aspects of the operation of public institutions.

The role of the U.S. federal government is limited to the following:

- ✓ Exercising leadership in promoting educational policies and reform efforts of national scope;
- ✓ Administering federal assistance programs authorized and appropriated by Congress;
- ✓ Enforcing federal civil rights laws as they pertain to education;
- ✓ Providing information and statistics about education at the national and international levels; and
- ✓ Providing technical expertise to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, other federal agencies and Executive Office of the President in conducting the foreign affairs of the United States as these pertain to education and within the limited scope of federal power in this area.

The federal government does not:

- ✓ Own, control or oversee U.S. schools or postsecondary institutions\*;
- ✓ Accredit, or license schools, postsecondary institutions, or other educational providers;
- ✓ Set curricula or content standards for academic or professional subjects;
- ✓ Hire or license faculty or other educational professionals;
- ✓ Set educational standards for the admission, enrollment, progress, or graduation of students at any level;
- ✓ Set standards, license, or regulate professional occupations or practicing professionals (other than federal civilian and military personnel); or
- ✓ Determine or allocate educational budgets for states, localities, or institutions.

\*Except for institutions established to serve federal personnel and their families, such as the military service academies and advanced service schools, plus public schools located overseas to educate children of U.S. personnel stationed abroad.

Source:

- International Affairs Office (2008) Organization of U.S. Education: State Role II - Tertiary Education, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec.doc> [30 Mar 2015]
- International Affairs Office (2008) Organization of U.S. Education: The Federal Role, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/fedrole.doc> [30 Mar 2015]

## 7. Related organizations

### Governmental organizations

- ✓ U.S. Department of Education [<http://www.ed.gov/>]
- ✓ White House [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/>]

### Accreditation council

- ✓ Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) [<http://www.chea.org/>]

### Educational institutions associations

- ✓ American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) [<http://www.aascu.org/>]
- ✓ American Council on Education (ACE) [<http://www.acenet.edu/Pages/default.aspx>]





- ✓ Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) [<https://www.acteonline.org/>]
- ✓ Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) [<http://www.aacu.org/>]
- ✓ Association of American Universities (AAU) [<http://www.aau.edu/>]
- ✓ Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) [<http://www.aplu.org/>]
- ✓ Council of Independent Colleges: CIC) [<http://www.cic.edu/>]
- ✓ National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) [<http://www.naicu.edu/>]

#### **Higher education-related foundations**

- ✓ Bill and Mellinda Gates Foundation [<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/>]
- ✓ Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching [<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>]
- ✓ Lumina Foundation [<http://www.luminafoundation.org/>]
- ✓ Teagle Foundation [<http://www.teaglefoundation.org/>]

#### **Media**

- ✓ Inside Higher Ed [<https://www.insidehighered.com/>]
- ✓ The Chronicle of Higher Education [<http://chronicle.com/>]

\*Above websites were accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> Apr 2015.

## **8. Management and student engagement in higher education institutions**

### Administration

Although the internal organization and structure of U.S. institutions vary based upon size and mission, some common elements exist.

**Board of trustees:** Boards of trustees who tend not to be academics govern most college and universities. These boards are the legal agents for the institution and are responsible for ensuring and monitoring its financial health, setting strategy to fulfill its mission, and evaluating both institutional and presidential performance. The size, structure, and appointment of boards vary.

**President:** Boards hire and delegate much of the administrative responsibility for managing the institution to the president (sometimes called a chancellor). A president is responsible for providing overall leadership to the institution, managing its finances and budget, developing and executing the institution's strategic plan, and establishing systems of accountability and performance. However, much of a president's work lies outside the institution. A president advocates for the institution's needs and seeks support from legislative and other external audiences, meets with alumni and prospective students, develops relationships with corporations and community groups, and provides the public persona of the institution.

**Faculty senate:** Although presidents have primary responsibility for the institution, most rely upon a system of shared governance between faculty and administrators for key institutional decisions. The primary organizational structure for shared governance is the faculty senate. The senate is responsible for

recommending academic decisions and policies, such as those affecting new curricula and courses, degree requirements, and academic hiring and workloads. Its members typically include full-time faculty, although students, administrators, staff, and part-time faculty sometimes participate as well.

### Student organizations

Higher education institutions host various student organizations and clubs, including academically focused groups, as well as athletic, cultural and religious, and social organizations. Another important student organization is student government, which is a formal, recognized student advocacy body on campus.

Source:

- Eckel, P.D. & King, J.E. (2004) *An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access, and the Role of the Marketplace*, Washington DC: American Council on Education, Available: <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity-Access-and-the-Role-of-the-Marketplace-2004.pdf> [11 Mar 2015] pp.11-12

## 9. Tuition

### Average published tuition for full-time, first-time undergraduate students

|                             |                    | In-district | In-state | Out-of-state |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Public                      | Total              | 4,169       | 4,460    | 10,426       |
|                             | Four-year          | 6,255       | 6,265    | 15,792       |
|                             | Two-year           | 2,671       | 3,164    | 6,786        |
|                             | Less-than two-year | 6,530       | 6,530    | 7,038        |
| Private<br>(not-for-profit) | Total              | 23,009      | 23,016   | 23,028       |
|                             | Four-year          | 23,983      | 23,985   | 23,989       |
|                             | Two-year           | 12,389      | 12,459   | 12,581       |
|                             | Less-than two-year | 10,508      | 10,508   | 10,508       |
| Private<br>(for-profit)     | Total              | 14,549      | 14,549   | 14,549       |
|                             | Four-year          | 15,001      | 15,001   | 15,001       |
|                             | Two-year           | 13,923      | 13,923   | 13,923       |
|                             | Less-than two-year | 13,755      | 13,755   | 13,755       |
| Total                       |                    | 13,435      | 13,549   | 15,841       |

In USD, 2013/14, institutions in U.S. only

Source:

- National Center for Education Statistics (2015) IPEDS Data Center, Available: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/> [11 Mar 2015]

## 10. Student aid

A wide array of government and private financial aid programs provides assistance to students, based on both financial need and academic or other merit. Financial aid to students includes federal grants, loans, and tax



credits, state grants, and grants provided by colleges and universities, as well as private organizations.

Federal student aid is financial help for students enrolled in eligible programs at participating schools to cover school (a four-year or two-year public or private educational institution, a career school or trade school) expenses, including tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation. The three most common types of aid are grants, loans, and work-study.

Grants are a type of financial aid that doesn't have to be repaid. Generally, federal grants are for undergraduate students and the grant amount is based on need, Cost of Attendance, and enrollment status. Federal Pell Grants for 2015/16 will be provided up to \$5,775. Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants will range from \$100 to \$4,000. Many states also offer need-based grants, and many colleges and private organizations offer grants and scholarships.

Loans are borrowed money that must be repaid with interest. Both undergraduate and graduate students may borrow money. Maximum loan amounts depend on the student's year in school. Parents may also borrow to pay education expenses for dependent undergraduate students. For example, the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program, under which the U.S. Department of Education becomes lender, includes Direct Subsidized Loans for undergraduate students with financial need and Direct PLUS Loans for professional students and parents of dependent undergraduate students. Whereas, the Federal Perkins Loan Program, under which the school is lender, is a school-based loan program for undergraduates and graduate students with exceptional financial need.

Federal Work-study lets students earn money while enrolled in school to help pay for education expenses. The United States government does not provide student assistance to non-citizens except in the limited case of federal exchange programs and some research opportunities for scientists and mid-career professionals. Students who come to the United States to study for diplomas or degrees are expected to be able to pay for their study visits using their own resources plus assistance from their countries or private sources.

Source:

- The office of Federal Student Aid (2015) Federal Student Aid, Available: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/> [30 Mar 2015]

## 11. Higher education laws

The U.S. education system is not based on a single, or even a few, framework laws. Instead, there are a wide variety of federal, state and local laws, plus court decisions and regulations that define various aspects of its decentralized system. In addition, there are rules and policies adopted by educational associations and individual schools and institutions that often have legal status with respect to matters within their competence (Also refer to II-1. Historical overview of U.S. higher education).

The Higher Education Act of 1965 does not resemble the School Education Law in Japan, in which the

educational structure in the country is defined. The Higher Education Act in the U.S. was signed into law in 1965 for the government's commitment to make college experience within financial and geographic reach of everyone. Since then, it has been reauthorized nine times with additions and modifications of aid programs. The latest reauthorization occurred in 2008 under the title of Higher Education Opportunity Act.

Source:

- Bawn, S., Kurose, C., and McPherson, M. (2013) An Overview of American Higher Education, Available: [http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/23\\_01\\_02.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/23_01_02.pdf) [24 Mar 2015], p. 19
- International Affairs Office (2008) General Information Resources About Education in the United States, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/generalinfo.doc> [30 Mar 2015]
- *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2013) What You Need to Know About Reauthorization, 19 Sep 2013, Available: <http://chronicle.com/article/What-You-Need-to-Know-About/141697/> [22 Apr 2015]

### III. The quality assurance system

#### 1. Historical overview

##### Regional accreditation

Accreditation's origins are found in the activities and concerns of several regionally based associations of colleges and universities, starting from the foundation of New England Association of Schools and Colleges in 1885. By 1895, another three regional associations were established covering the Middle Atlantic states, the North Central states and the Southern states respectively. The North-West Association and the Western Association were established later, in 1917 and 1962 respectively.

Initially, the purposes of these associations were to establish closer relations between college administrators and those of secondary schools and, also, to establish standards regarding what constituted adequate preparation for college study. In addition, closer relations were also desired between member colleges to facilitate transfers. They eventually defined standards for membership in their associations and then extend admissions offers only to students applying from member institutions.

In 1905, the North Central Association took an action by certifying, or accrediting, secondary schools. This was followed by accreditation of colleges by 1909 and the first list of 'accredited' institutions was issued in 1913. Thus, accreditation became a firm basis on which to evaluate the worthiness of applicants from institutions that they had no direct knowledge of, including applicants from high schools and students who wished to transfer from one college to another. However, such an effort did not extend all across the country; the Western College Association began its accrediting activities only in 1948 and the New England Association in 1952.

From 1920s by the North Central Association, a change in approach occurred in accreditation that, instead of using a few numerical facts, each institution was judged qualitatively on its total activities and in accordance with its own stated purposes. Since then, especially from the post-Second World War era which saw rapid expansion in the number and type of higher education institutions, regional accrediting agencies have revised and modified both their standards and evaluation procedures a number of times.

##### Program accreditation

The initial development of program accreditation also occurred in the early twentieth century. However, the reason for action was different: with program accreditation, the precipitating issue was a concern with how well the colleges and universities were preparing their graduates.

It was the medical profession that was first to act when representatives of medical colleges took several steps to create a register of schools that met certain agreed-upon standards of quality between 1876 and 1903. However, the American Medical Association (AMA) - a membership association of individual practitioners - actually developed its own ten-category rating system for medical schools in 1905. Two years later, AMA issued a list of

acceptable schools based on its own inspection visits. These and subsequent actions by AMA are the basis for what would become program accreditation in medicine as well as in other professional fields; individual practitioner groups take the lead in setting standards.

Similarly, though the law schools association had developed a system of school visits and standards for legal education from 1900, the American Bar Association - the practitioner organization - began its own inspection activities from 1921 and onward. By 1930, several other professional areas including dentistry, architecture, library science, music, nursing, teacher education, collegiate business education also had accreditation-like activities. By 1952, 22 program accrediting agencies had been formally recognized by the federal government (see next paragraph). The number increased to 47 by 1982 and to 68 in 2014.

### Relationship with government

The U.S. tradition has long been one in which the federal government maintained an at-a-distance relationship with higher education institutions, whereas individual states have the major responsibility for education. Having said that, the federal government expanded its involvement with the sector, as a result of the long-term expansion of U.S. higher education that took place from the end of the Second World War.

Today, the federal government is responsible for the financial support for grants and loans that support higher education students. In 1952, the federal recognition process was initiated as a way of regulating the accreditation enterprise and producing a list of federally recognized accrediting organization. The Higher Education Act of 1965 required the federal government to somehow determine institutional eligibility to receive these funds. The U.S. Department of Education, then, has directed that institutions are eligible for participation in federal aid programs if they meet two fundamental conditions: (1) they are authorized or licensed by the state in which they were located; and (2) they are accredited by one of the nationally recognized accrediting bodies determined to be reliable authorities on the quality of education that higher education institutions offer. In 1992, the modified Higher Education Act stated the list of standards accrediting organizations should observe for the Department's recognition.

### CHEA

The development of accreditation in U.S. was unplanned and produced many instances of duplication and unanticipated difficulty. As a result, efforts to coordinate accreditation on a national basis have been taken over a long period of time. The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) formed. It established process for recognizing accrediting organizations. COPA dissolved and the National Policy Board on Institutional Accreditation (NPB) established in 1993 to examine need for national coordination of accreditation. The NPB-established working group designed a new organization to coordinate accreditation and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) was formed in 1996 (see more details in 3-2).

### Conclusion

Quality assurance in the U.S. higher education, thus, consists of voluntary accreditation based on a long

tradition of cooperation among academic institutions and agencies of the federal government and state governments providing necessary oversight. The three players in quality assurance are often referred to as “triad”: accreditors, the federal government and state governments.

Sources:

- Altbach, P.G., Gumport, P.J. and Berdahl, R.O. (1998) *American Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, pp.39-43, 57, 64
- Ewell, P.T. (2008) *U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance: A Tenth Anniversary Report from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation*, Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, pp.17-21, 28, 48
- The Commission Appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings (2006) *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, Available: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf> [30 Mar 2015] p. ix
- El-Khawas (2001) *Accreditation in the USA: origins, developments and future prospects*, Available: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001292/129295e.pdf> [30 Mar 2015] pp. 27-37, 121-4

## 2. Introduction

The system of higher education in the United States is the most diverse in the world and higher education quality review is not an exception. Unlike most countries, the United States has no centralized “Ministry of Education” to enforce national standards. Instead, formal, official oversight is performed by the “triad” (accreditors, the federal governments and states). Additionally, some institutions also engage in voluntary review of their own programs by nonprofit nongovernmental organizations and for-profit services.

### External quality assurance

External quality assurance refers to activities undertaken by organizations or agencies outside of a higher education institution or a program to measure, validate or certify its quality. External bodies review in many forms, from accreditation to federal data collection and from state accountability and licensure reviews to survey-based rankings of institutions.

The purposes of external review are also manifold and include:

- ✓ promoting institutional accountability,
- ✓ ensuring that institutions meet specific certification or licensing requirements,
- ✓ establishing the eligibility of institutions to offer degrees and certificates,
- ✓ enabling institutions or programs to receive public funding,
- ✓ enforcing minimum financial and administrative standards,
- ✓ providing consumers with information on which to base education-related decisions,
- ✓ improving quality within institutions and programs.

### Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance has long been part of the culture of higher education. Tenure and promotion reviews, peer reviews of research, student evaluations and program reviews are examples of this tradition. Governing boards also play an influential quality assurance role.

Source:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2007) *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007*, Washington D.C.: CHEA, p. 3

## Student learning outcomes and assessment

Student learning outcomes have been an increasingly popular concept for quality assurance in the United States. Education institutions have been trying various ways to objectively assess what student obtain from their educational programs, in part because accreditation organizations require such efforts.

Most accreditors, via accreditation standards, require member institutions to establish assessment methods for learning outcomes; e.g. setting learning outcomes at an institution, program and course levels, and utilizing various methodologies to assess them both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Meanwhile, the recognition process by the USDE and CHEA for accreditation organizations also include standards which mentions student learning outcomes. A recognized accreditor is required to ask institutions to concern about learning outcomes through its standards.

There are various ways to assess learning outcomes. The list Kuh *et al.* (2014) provided includes;

- ✓ Incoming student placement exams (ACCUPLACER, COMPASS),
- ✓ National student surveys (NSSE, CCSSE, UCUES, CIRP),
- ✓ General knowledge and skills measures (CLA, CAAP, ETS PP)
- ✓ Locally developed knowledge and skills measures,
- ✓ Classroom-based performance assessments such as simulations, comprehensive exams, critiques
- ✓ Externally situated performance assessments such as internships or other community-based projects
- ✓ Portfolios
- ✓ Capstone projects (including senior theses), courses, or experiences
- ✓ Rubrics
- ✓ Alumni surveys, focus groups, or interviews
- ✓ Employer surveys, focus groups, or interviews.

The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) has developed the VALUE rubrics, which provide a good source of dialogue on assessment of college student learning. Consisting of 16 learning outcomes shown below, the VALUE rubrics describe frequently identified characteristics or criteria for each area.

List of rubrics: inquiry and analysis, critical thinking, creative thinking, written communication, oral communication, reading, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork, problem solving, civic engagement - local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning, foundations and skills for lifelong learning, global learning, integrative learning.



The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) has awarded the CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes to highlight institutional efforts to gather information on student learning outcomes, to use this information for institutional improvement and to provide information to the public since 2005. Institutions and programs are judged on the basis of criteria including articulating expected outcomes for an institution, program or major; providing evidence of success with regard to outcomes; informing the public (constituents external to an institution) about expectations and success with regard to outcomes; using outcomes for institutional improvement; and evidence that outcomes have benefited the institution, program or major.

### Acronyms

ACCUPLACER is a suite of tests that quickly, accurately and efficiently assesses reading, writing, math and computer skills. ACT Compass is a computer-adaptive college placement test that lets educators evaluate incoming students' levels. NSSE : National Survey of Student Engagement, CCSSE : Community College Survey of Student Engagement, UCUES : University of California undergraduate Experience Survey, CIRP : Cooperative Institutional Research Program, CLA : Collegiate Learning Assessment, CAAP : Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency, ETS PP : ETS Proficiency Profile

### Sources:

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- Association of American Colleges & Universities (2015) VALUE Rubrics, Available: <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics> [1 Apr 2015]
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### 3. Type of quality assurance system

- ✓ Accreditation
- ✓ Recognition of accrediting organizations
- ✓ Federal oversight of higher education
- ✓ State quality review of higher education
- ✓ Approval by state government

#### 3-1. Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used in higher education to scrutinize higher education institutions and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement.

Both federal and state governments consider accreditation to be a reliable authority on academic quality. The federal government relies on accreditation to assure the quality of institutions and programs for which the government provides federal funds and federal student aid. Most state governments initially license institutions and programs without accreditation. However, states will subsequently require accreditation to make state funds available to institutions and students and, in many cases, to maintain state licensure.

#### Values and beliefs of regional accreditation

U.S. regional accreditation is built upon a core set of traditional academic values and beliefs. These are described by the following statements:

- ✓ Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for academic quality; colleges and universities are the leaders and the key sources of authority in academic matters,
- ✓ Institutional mission is central to judgments of academic quality,
- ✓ Institutional autonomy is essential to sustaining and enhancing academic quality,
- ✓ The higher education enterprise and our society thrive on decentralization and diversity of institutional purpose and mission.

#### Roles of accreditation

- ✓ Assuring quality: Accreditation is the primary means by which higher education institutions and programs assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or a program meets at least threshold standards for, for instance, its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programs provide evidence of fiscal stability.
- ✓ Access to federal and state funds: Accreditation by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education is required for access to federal funds such as student aid and other federal programs. Federal student aid funds are available to students only if the institution or the program they are attending is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization. State funds to institutions and students are contingent

on accredited status.

- ✓ Engendering private sector confidence: Accreditation status of an institution or a program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. Private individuals and foundations look for evidence of accreditation when making decisions about private giving.
- ✓ Easing transfer: Accreditation is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among higher education institutions. Receiving institutions take note of whether or not the credits a student wishes to transfer have been earned at an accredited institution. Although accreditation is but one among several factors taken into account by receiving institutions, it is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality.

### Type and number of accrediting bodies

As of October 2014, there are 86 accrediting organizations in the United States recognized either by the Department of Education or the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, consisting of the following types:

#### 1) Institutional accreditors

- ✓ Regional accrediting organizations  
Targets: Non-profit colleges and universities (both public and private)  
Number of organizations: 7 (located in six geographic regions)
- ✓ National faith-based accrediting organizations  
Targets: Religiously affiliated and doctrinally based institutions on a national basis  
Number of organizations: 4
- ✓ National career-related accrediting organizations  
Targets: For-profit, career-based, single-purpose institutions, both degree and non-degree  
Number of organizations: 7

#### 2) Programmatic accreditors

- ✓ Programmatic or specialized accrediting organizations  
Targets: Individual academic programs, professions and free-standing schools; e.g. law, medicine, engineering and health professions.  
Number of organizations: 68

Accrediting organizations are accountable to the institutions and programs they accredit. They are accountable to the public and governments that have invested heavily in higher education and expect quality. Accreditors undertake an organizational self-assessment on a routine basis. Accreditors also undergo a periodic external review of their organizations known as “recognition.” by the U.S. Department of Education and/or CHEA (For more details, refer to III-3-2. Recognition of accrediting organizations).

### Frequency

Review cycle vary, with some accreditors requiring comprehensive reviews every three years, some requiring five-year reviews and still others every ten years. Some accreditors have a system for more focused mid-cycle reviews.

### Standards and policies

While each accrediting organization establishes its own standards by which institutions and programs are accredited, these standards all address similar areas, such as expected student achievement, curriculum, faculty, services and academic support for students, and financial capacity. Standards are developed or changed through a process of public consultation involving stakeholders such as faculty, administrators, students, practitioners in specific fields, governing boards and members of the public. This process often involves an invitation to the public.

Each accrediting organization lays out a framework of expectations and practices that govern the conduct of accreditation review. These policies may include areas such as conflict of interest and release of information.

### Stages of accreditation

- ✓ Establishment of eligibility: Every accrediting organization has certain basic requirements that institutions or programs must meet before they can apply for a review. Not all accrediting organizations have eligibility requirements, but all accreditors do require that an institution be licensed or have authority to operate from the state in which it is located and have education as its primary purpose. Such institutional or program eligibility requirements serve as a pre-screening for quality.
- ✓ Self-study: Once accepted for review, each institution or program must prepare a comprehensive evaluation of its performance based on the accrediting organization's established standards or criteria. This self-study involves the preparation of detailed written reports showing how the institution or program determines whether it meets or exceeds the standards, as well as how it plans to improve its quality in the future. Self-study reports may be prepared as confidential documents, although many institutions publish them after the accreditation review cycle has been completed.
- ✓ On-site team visit: The self-study becomes the basis for scrutiny by an accrediting organization's review team during a visit to the campus. Team members have an opportunity to talk to faculty, students, staff and administrators about issues and questions arising from the self-study. The team usually conducts an exit interview with the president or dean to discuss issues that have surfaced during the review.
- ✓ Written team report: The visiting team prepares a comprehensive accreditation report that includes judgments about the institution's or program's strengths, weaknesses and potential for improvement. The draft report is usually shared with the campus or program leadership before it is made final. The final report is then submitted to the accrediting organization, with recommendations about what action should be taken.
- ✓ Final decisions/appeals: Based on the team report, self-study and other evidence assembled by staff of the accrediting organization, its commission or governing body takes an accreditation action. Accreditation

actions can take several forms, from granting accreditation to revoking accredited status. All accrediting organizations permit appeals of their decisions to revoke accreditation.

- ✓ **Monitoring:** All accrediting organizations also monitor institutions and programs between visits. Monitoring may be relatively unobtrusive in the form of a requirement to file annual statistical reports, or it may be more extensive, including telephone contact, interim reports on topics of concern or additional focused site visits. If the institution or program has changed its curriculum, offerings or instructional methods or has opened a new site, the accreditor may require it to undertake a substantive change review to examine the appropriateness of these new arrangements and their potential impact on the quality of the core program.

### Schedule

Each accreditor sets its own schedule. The amount of time for an accreditation review varies; e.g. from nine months to several years to complete a full review.

### Publication of data

Generally speaking, the following information is made available by accrediting organizations:

- ✓ Self-study reports and team visit reports offering description and analysis of institutions and programs that are reviewed (certain circumstances or permission required),
- ✓ Dates of upcoming accreditation visits,
- ✓ Members of an organization's accrediting decision-making body,
- ✓ Staff members of accrediting organizations,
- ✓ Finances of accrediting organizations.

### Institutions and programs accredited by recognized accrediting organizations (As of 2013)

| Accreditor type                                       | Number of Institutions | Number of programs |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Regional accrediting organizations                    | 3,049                  | -                  |
| National faith-based accrediting organizations        | 503                    | -                  |
| National career-related accrediting organizations     | 4,344                  | -                  |
| Programmatic or specialized accrediting organizations | -                      | 42,686             |

Source:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2015) CHEA Almanac Online, Available: <http://www.chea.org/Almanac%20Online/index.asp> [30 Oct 2015]

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) database lists nearly 7,900 degree-granting and non-degree-granting institutions and over 40,000 programs that are accredited by U.S. accrediting organizations that have been recognized either by CHEA or by the United States Department of Education (USDE) or both. Each accrediting organization's list of institutions or programs is prefaced by a brief

description of the accredited status of the institutions or programs on the list and the year for which the list is accurate.

### Funds

Accrediting organizations are funded primarily by annual dues from institutions and programs that are accredited and fees that institutions and programs pay for accreditation reviews. In some instances, an accrediting organization may receive financial assistance from sponsoring organizations. Accrediting organizations sometimes obtain funds for special initiatives from government or from private foundations.

Source:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2006) Accrediting Organizations in the United States: How Do They Operate to Assure Quality?, Fact Sheet #5, Available: [http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact\\_sheet\\_5\\_operation.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact_sheet_5_operation.pdf) [30 Mar 2015]
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2007) *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007*, Washington D.C.: CHEA, pp. 8-9
- Council for Higher Education (2015) CHEA Almanac Online, Available: <http://www.chea.org/Almanac%20Online/index.asp> [30 Mar 2015]
- Eaton, J.S. (2012) *An Overview of U.S. Accreditation*, Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Available: <http://www.chea.org/pdf/Overview%20of%20US%20Accreditation%202012.pdf> [30 Mar 2015] pp. 1-3, 6-7
- Ewell, P.T. (2008) *U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance: A Tenth Anniversary Report from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation*, Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, pp. 12-16

## **3-2. Recognition of accrediting organizations**

In the United States, accreditors are accountable to the institutions and programs they accredit. They are accountable to the public and government that have invested heavily in higher education and expect quality. Accreditors undertake an organizational self-assessment on a routine basis and are required to have internal complaint procedures. Accreditors undergo a periodic external review of their organizations known as “recognition.” Recognition is carried out either by CHEA or USDE.

### (1) CHEA recognition of accreditation

CHEA is a national, private, nonprofit higher education organization that was established in 1996. CHEA’s purpose is to coordinate institutional and programmatic accreditation in the United States. To realize this purpose, CHEA carries out three functions: representing the interests of private, voluntary self-regulation to the federal government and the public; scrutiny (recognition) of the quality of accrediting organizations based on standards established by CHEA for this purpose; and a range of membership activities that include conferences and meetings, research, policy analysis and publications.

#### CHEA - Recognition standards

An accrediting organization seeking CHEA recognition is required to provide evidence that the following standards have been met.

- 1) Advance academic quality
- 2) Demonstrate accountability
- 3) Encourage, where appropriate, self-scrutiny and planning for change and needed improvement
- 4) Employ appropriate and fair practices in decision making

- 5) Demonstrate ongoing review of accreditation practice
- 6) Possess sufficient resources

#### CHEA - Frequency and implementing structure

CHEA accreditors are normally reviewed on a 10-year cycle with two interim reports. The review is carried out by the CHEA Committee on Recognition, a group of institutional representatives, accreditors and public members who scrutinize accreditors for their eligibility for CHEA recognition and review accreditors based on an accreditor's self-evaluation. The review may also include a site visit. The Committee on Recognition makes recommendations to the CHEA governing board to affirm or deny recognition to an accreditor.

#### (2) Federal recognition of accreditation organizations

The federal recognition process was initiated in 1952. The government sought some screening for higher education quality to be linked to the burgeoning federal student financial assistance program. Rather than create a quality assurance system of its own, the government chose to rely on accreditation. Federal recognition is currently required for accrediting organizations that certify institutional eligibility for participation in federal student financial aid programs under Title IV of the 1965 Higher Education Act or certain other federal funding. Higher education institutions and programs wishing to participate in federal student aid or other federal programs must be accredited by a federally recognized accrediting organization.

#### USDE - Recognition standards

Currently, the agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

- 1) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, including as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examination and job placement rates,
- 2) Curricula,
- 3) Faculty,
- 4) Facilities, equipment and supplies,
- 5) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations,
- 6) Student support services,
- 7) Recruiting and admission practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications grading and advertising,
- 8) Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered,
- 9) Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency,
- 10) 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.

#### USDE - Frequency and implementing structure

The federal recognition review normally takes place every five years. USDE staff conduct the review based on





communication with the accreditor, a written report from the accreditor and, from time to time, a visit to the accreditor. USDE staff make recommendations to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), an appointed group of educators and public members, to recognize or not recognize an accrediting organization. The committee, in turn, recommends action to the U.S. Secretary of Education.

### (3) Recognized organizations

CHEA and USDE recognize many of the same accrediting organizations, but not all. USDE recognizes only those accreditors whose accreditation makes the institution's students eligible for Federal financial aid; because the Federal financial aid program is defined under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, these accreditors are often called "Title IV gatekeepers". Whereas, there are a number of specialized, programmatic accreditors that are not Title IV gatekeepers; CHEA recognizes those. Also, some Title IV gatekeepers voluntarily choose to earn CHEA recognition as well, resulting in some overlaps. In 2014, CHEA recognizes 60 accrediting organizations and USDE recognizes 51 accrediting organizations with a total of 85 accrediting organizations that were recognized by either USDE or CHEA or both.

### (4) Funds

CHEA funds its recognition activity through annual fees charged to its institutional members. The federal government funds its recognition activity through a budget allocation from Congress to USDE.

#### Sources:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2007) *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007*, Washington D.C.: CHEA, pp. 11-12
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2008) *Recognition of Accrediting Organizations: Policy and Procedures* (revised), Available: [http://chea.org/pdf/Recognition\\_Policy-June\\_28\\_2010-FINAL.pdf](http://chea.org/pdf/Recognition_Policy-June_28_2010-FINAL.pdf) [30 Mar 2015], pp. 4-8
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2014) *Recognized Accrediting Organizations*, Available: [http://www.chea.org/pdf/CHEA\\_USDE\\_AllAccred.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/CHEA_USDE_AllAccred.pdf) [15 Oct 2014]
- Eaton, J.S. (2012) *An Overview of U.S. Accreditation*, Washington D.C.: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Available: <http://www.chea.org/pdf/Overview%20of%20US%20Accreditation%202012.pdf> [30 Mar 2015] pp. 6-8
- U.S. Department of Education (2015) *Accreditation in the United States*, Available: [http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation\\_pg13.html](http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg13.html) [17 Mar 2015]

## 3-3. State quality review of higher education

State-level quality review affects both public and private higher education institutions, but it is particularly important for public institutions because they are dependent on state legislatures for a significant amount of their funding. In the meantime, the quality of state review varies dramatically; some states do not require that institutions be accredited in order to operate (e.g. California and Hawaii).

### State Reviews

State quality review of higher education falls into two basic categories:

#### 1) Reviews for state licensure, which affect private institutions

All private institutions must be licensed at the state level to offer degrees, credentials or certificates (Refer to II-6. Federal and local governments).





- 2) Reviews for state authority to operate and public accountability, including budget, policy and performance reviews, which primarily affect public institutions

Public institutions require state authorization to operate. This is usually accomplished when the institution is created by the state legislature.

State reviews, to the extent that they are required in addition to or in place of nongovernmental accreditation reviews, may focus on the same aspects of quality that are examined by most accreditors. Institutions are reviewed for financial stability and administrative capacity, for overall institutional stability, for educational quality, and to assure that they are providing the kinds of programs they claim to offer.

\* The federal government only license or charter schools or institutions directly operated by it for the purpose of educating or training government personnel or their children.

#### Accountability initiatives for public institutions

The role of state oversight in assuring improved higher education accountability has been the subject of intense public policy debate. States have long been engaged in the direct assessment of public institutional performance through program reviews, data collection and budgeting processes. More recent accountability initiatives are also designed to yield readily understandable public information. All 50 states require some kind of assessment and evaluation of public higher education institutions, and most states have extended their systems to assure accountability as well, through public reporting on performance measures and a focus on the use of resources.

Current dominant themes in state accountability systems include the need to pay attention to undergraduate education and student learning outcomes and to the connection between institutional quality and student learning. Most states require public institutions to formulate student learning and outcomes assessment procedures and to set goals that will assure improvement in the quality of student learning. Increasingly, states are also looking for quantitative measures of student achievement and institutional performance, in order to document progress and improvement.

#### Sources:

- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2007) *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007*, Washington D.C.: CHEA, pp. 15-16
- International Affairs Office (2008) Organization of U.S. Education: State Role II - Tertiary Education, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec.doc> [30 Mar 2015]
- International Affairs Office (2008) Organization of U.S. Education: The Federal Role, U.S. Department of Education, Available: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/fedrole.doc> [30 Mar 2015]

## 4. Legitimate higher education institutions

An accredited status from a recognized accreditation organization and licensure from a state government are an important factor to decide whether a higher education institution is legitimate or not.



However, CHEA and USDE do not recognize all the organizations which undertake appropriate accreditation activity because recognition is a voluntary process for accreditors to go through. Thus, when you need to know if a particular higher education institution is authorized to operate as a higher education institution by the state in which it operates, an investigation is individually required by using various sources such as those listed below (NB: some institutions operate as business entities rather than higher education institutions).

Useful websites and databases

#### **The Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs**

<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/>

(Database for institutions and programs accredited by USDE-recognized accreditors or state governments)

#### **Database of Institutions and Programs Accredited by Recognized United States Accrediting Organizations**

<http://chea.org/search/default.asp>

(Database for institutions and programs accredited by CHEA- or USDE-recognized accreditors)

#### **Lists of departments responsible of establishment of higher education institutions in each state**

<http://www.nasasps.org/listing-of-regular-members>

<http://www.chea.org/degremills/frmStates.htm>

Source:

- Fujieda, E. (2015) 米国における分野別高等教育質保証の現状, 大学評価協議会研究会, 16th Mar, Kodaira

## **5. ‘Diploma mills’ and ‘Accreditation mills’**

In their quest for higher education and training, students and the public in the United States sometimes encounter ‘diploma mills’ - also known as ‘degree mills’ that are dubious providers of educational offerings or operations that offer certificates and degrees that are considered bogus. They may also encounter ‘accreditation mills’ - dubious providers of accreditation and quality assurance or operations that offer a certification of quality of institutions that is considered bogus.

Diploma mills and accreditation mills mislead and harm. In the United States, degrees and certificates from mills may not be acknowledged by other institutions when students seek to transfer or to go to graduate school. Employers may not acknowledge degrees and certificates from diploma mills when providing tuition assistance for continuing education. ‘Accreditation’ from an accreditation mill can mislead students and the public about the quality of an institution. In the presence of diploma mills and accreditation mills, students may spend a good deal of money and receive neither an education nor useable credential.

In the Section 103 of Higher Education Opportunity Act, the term ‘diploma mill’ means an entity that;

- (A) (i) offers, for a fee, degrees, diplomas, or certificates, that may be used to represent to the general public that the individual possessing such a degree, diploma, or certificate has completed a program of

postsecondary education or training; and (ii) requires such individual to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain such degree, diploma, or certificate; and

(B) lacks accreditation by an accrediting agency or association that is recognized as an accrediting agency or association of institutions of higher education (as such term is defined in section 102) by--

(i) the Secretary pursuant to subpart 2 of part H of title IV; or (ii) a Federal agency, State government, or other organization or association that recognizes accrediting agencies or associations.

The Better Business Bureau suggests one watch for the following features and regard them as red flags when considering whether or not to enroll in a school:

- ✓ Degrees that can be earned in less time than at an accredited postsecondary institution, an example would be earning a Bachelor's degree in a few months.
- ✓ A list of accrediting agencies that sounds a little too impressive. Often, these schools will list accreditation by organizations that are not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. These schools will also imply official approval by mentioning state registration or licensing.
- ✓ Offers that place unrealistic emphasis on offering college credits for lifetime or real world experience.
- ✓ Tuition paid on a per-degree basis, or discounts for enrolling in multiple degree programs. Accredited institutions charge by credit hours, course, or semester.
- ✓ Little or no interaction with professors.
- ✓ Names that are similar to well-known reputable universities.
- ✓ Addresses that are box numbers or suites. That campus may very well be a mail drop box or someone's attic.

A fake accrediting agency, in the meantime, offers its accreditation for a fee without an in-depth review of the school's programs or teachers. They may even use all the right sounding words in their marketing materials to describe their accrediting standards and review processes.

#### Sources:

- BBB of Chicago & Northern Illinois (2014) Better Business Bureau Warns Consumers: "Diploma Mills" Can Damage Your Future, Available: <http://www.bbb.org/chicago/news-events/news-releases/2014/better-business-bureau-warns-consumers-diploma-mills-can-damage-your-future/> [27 Apr 2015]
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2015) Important Questions about Accreditation, Degree Mills and Accreditation Mills, Available: <http://www.chea.org/degremills/default.htm> [18 Mar 2015]
- U.S. Department of Education (2015) Diploma Mills and Accreditation, Available: <http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills/index.html> [18 Mar 2015]
- U.S. Government Printing Office (2015) Higher Education Opportunity Act, Available: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ315/html/PLAW-110publ315.htm> [20 Apr 2015]

# Overview of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education

United States of America

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Universal design fonts that are easy to read and understand are used in this document.



National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation