

TEN WAYS IN WHICH ACCREDITATION SERVES STUDENTS, SOCIETY AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

“Accreditation” is the primary means of assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions and programs in the United States. Active for the past 100 years, this private, voluntary system of self-examination and peer review has been central to the creation of a U.S. higher education enterprise that is outstanding in many respects.

Accreditation is



1. The primary public symbol of legitimate higher education for over 100 years

- A key litmus test of threshold academic quality
- Approximately 7,600 higher education institutions and more than 23,500 programs accredited as of 2017



2. The primary reliable authority for federal and state governments funding for higher education

- Accreditation required for student access to federal and state grants and loans, now \$170 billion annually
- Accreditation required for institution and program access to:
 - Other federal funds for research and programs and
 - Funds for operating in some states



3. The primary reliable authority for private sector financial support for higher education

- Accreditation required to obtain private foundation support
- Accreditation required to obtain corporate support: research and tuition assistance



4. A major source of protection against fraud and abuse for students and consumers

- Primary bulwark against degree mills, accreditation mills and visa mills
- Standards that hold institutions and programs accountable for the integrity of their work with students and the information they provide the public



5. Successful in encouraging major innovation while maintaining quality over the years, such as

- The development of community colleges
- The advent of online learning, schools, programs and classes
- The growth of for-profit higher education
- The emergence of innovative non-institutional providers



6. Cost-efficient in the use of resources to achieve its goals

- Expended more than \$154 million in 2014–2015 and, with these funds:
 - Took major action with regard to more than 10,000 institutions and programs
 - Operated more than 80 recognized accrediting organizations with approximately 790 full- and part-time staff
 - Involved more than 16,000 volunteers



7. Central to states carrying out licensure of the professions

- Many states require that professional programs be accredited
- Many states require that individuals who sit for licensure examinations in the professions have graduated from accredited programs



8. Essential to international mobility

- Vital to international students, governments and higher education institutions for
 - Judgments about transfer of credit
 - Judgments about recognition of qualifications and degrees
 - Judgments about entry to U.S. higher education from other countries



9. Responsive to current climate accountability

- Equipped to meet current challenges:
 - Development of student learning outcomes
 - Information about institutional performance
 - Greater transparency
 - Improving transfer of credit



10. Vital to maintaining key features of higher education that have contributed to the enterprise as among the best in the world.

- A diverse array of institutions
- A mission-based system
- Responsible institutional independence for academic judgment
- Responsible academic freedom

Accreditation is a highly successful and well-tested system of quality assurance and quality improvement



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