

Is this a good school?

Strategies to help evaluate the quality of postsecondary educational programs and schools.

Thinking of learning a new job skill or enrolling in a non-traditional degree program? Beware of misleading advertising about educational opportunities that sound too good to be true.

Is this institution accredited?

Accreditation is a nongovernmental, voluntary, peer evaluation process. To become accredited by a U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency, institutions and their programs must show that they meet certain standards established by the accrediting agency.

“Institutional” accrediting agencies establish standards for the entire institution. “Program” or “specialized” accrediting agencies establish standards that apply to programs, departments, or schools for specific fields of study such as nursing or engineering.

Accreditation does not provide automatic acceptance by an institution of credit earned at another institution, nor does it give assurance of employment of graduates by employers.

The U.S. Department of Education reviews and recognizes accrediting agencies. Accreditation by a USDE recognized accrediting agency is one criterion for institutional eligibility for Federal funds. Another indicator of credibility for accrediting agencies is membership with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA is a nongovernmental organization that evaluates and recognizes the work of its member accrediting agencies.

To find out if an institution has recognized accreditation, get the name of the agency that accredits the institution. Then check the name of the agency on the CHEA and USDE online directories listed in this brochure under “Other resources for information.”

Will employers accept the training as preparation for employment?

Call the human resources department of some organizations in the field you would like to enter. Ask what credentials they look for in prospective employees. Do they recognize certifications from vocational schools? If so, which ones? Ask, too, if openings in the field are plentiful.

What preparation do you need for a particular occupation?

Is there a specific educational level required to obtain an entry-level position in the field that you would like to enter? Contact professional licensure agencies or certification organizations and ask what is needed to achieve licensure or certification. Ask if graduates from the institution applied for licensure or certification and received it. If licensure or certification is required for the field you would like to enter, request the percentage of students who pass their licensing exams and are placed in jobs.

“Licensing” is a term indicating a mandatory procedure imposed by law usually regulated by a governmental agency. “Certification” usually refers to a voluntary process and is granted by organizations that administer tests developed in consultation with authorities in the field. “Certification” and “certificate” are not interchangeable. There are many occupations for which there are not state licensing, federal licensing, or certification testing requirements.

Visit the School

Don’t assume that you have to sign an enrollment agreement while you are there.

While you are at the school do the following:

- Get a copy of the schools catalog
- Are equipment and facilities up-to-date? Is equipment similar to equipment you will be using on the job? Are suitable library resources available to you?
- Sit in on a class or two. Do the instructors seem knowledgeable? Are the students participating? What kind of work are the students doing?
- Talk to current students in the program you are considering. How long have they been in school? Do they like the program? Are they learning what they need to know to get a job? What is their opinion of the instructor? How much time do they spend studying outside class? What do they like the most about the program/school? What do they like the least?
- Talk with some instructors in the program you are considering. How long have they been teaching at the school? Do they teach full-time or part-time? What kinds of activities are they involved in that relate to the field of study? What kind of background do they have in the field?

“Lifetime Promise”

If the institution advertises that it provides to graduates access to placement services or classes for a given time or “lifetime,” consider that “lifetime” may actually be limited by the life of the institution, courses, or programs. Depending on demand, economy, or other circumstances, schools close, discontinue courses within programs, discontinue programs, or change policies.

Find out about transferring courses

If you have taken courses that you would like to transfer to a new program, take a copy of your transcript to the admissions office when you visit. Courses you have taken will not automatically transfer to your new program. The receiving institution will decide whether it will accept any credits in transfer.

If you think you want might want to use coursework from the institution you are considering to count toward a program at another institution and ask the admissions or registrar’s office the following:

- From what kinds of institutions do you regularly accept credits?
- What kind of information is considered when deciding acceptance of credits from other institutions?
- Have you accepted credits from (school name)?

Find out if students have filed complaints against the institution

The Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education accepts complaints about the institutions it licenses. The licensing staff will provide general information regarding formal complaints. Other agencies or organizations that may provide information regarding complaints are the institution's accrediting agency or your local Better Business Bureau.

Other resourceful information**Information and Recognized Accrediting Agency Directories:**

United States Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/admin/finaid/index.html>

Council for Higher Education Accreditation

<http://www.chea.org/>

General Information about Postsecondary Education:

www.electroniccampus.org

www.petersons.com

www.geteducated.com

Diploma Mill Information:

www.degree.net

www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/dm0.html

<http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/>

http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact_sheet_6_diploma_mills.pdf