

Frequently Asked Questions About Accreditation

Q: I'm thinking about studying at an American college in Greece. How do I know if the institution is accredited in the United States?

A: Check with the Fulbright Commission's educational advising office in Athens (6 Vas. Sofias St., 210-724-1811) or with the cultural affairs unit of the U.S. Embassy in Athens (210-720-2300). They can advise you if the school you are considering is accredited in the U.S.

Q: Does the Embassy actually accredit schools in Greece?

A: No, the Embassy does not have that authority or expertise. Instead, we use a directory called "Accredited Institutions of Post-Secondary Education," published annually by the American Council on Education (www.acenet.edu).

Fulbright commissions and U.S. embassies around the world, at the direction of the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, use this directory.

Q: What is accreditation, exactly?

A: Accreditation is an official stamp of approval for the level of performance, integrity, solvency and quality of an academic institution and its programs. In the U.S., this recognition is extended through qualified regional or national nongovernmental agencies, which are approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the American Council on Education (ACE). These agencies establish criteria for accreditation, arrange site visits to evaluate institutions, and publicly designate those institutions that meet the criteria.

There is no federal government accrediting body for higher education in the United States. One good source of accreditation information is CHEA, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (www.chea.org).

They are a private, non-profit national organization that coordinates accreditation in the United States.

Q: How often are schools evaluated?

A: Accredited institutions are subject to periodic review. Institutions and programs can be reviewed on cycles that range from every few years to every ten years, based on the type of institution and the accrediting agency's guidelines. This serves the purpose of making sure accredited institutions constantly review and update their programs, in order to keep their accreditation.

Q: How does accreditation actually work?

A: Evaluation of an institution or program is based on the "Standards for Accreditation" set by the accrediting association. Each association has its own standards, which are determined by the association's members.

The evaluation process starts with a self-evaluation of the institution against the Standards for Accreditation. The school or university prepares a study of its operation, examining the roles of students, faculty, administrators, alumni, trustees, and the local community. This report is then reviewed by the appropriate accrediting commission and serves as a basis for evaluation by a site-visit team of peer evaluators. The team consists of professional educators and specialists. They prepare an evaluation report, which is forwarded to the accreditation commission.

The recognition process may take up to two years or more and may be granted for a specific term (five to ten years). For additional information, go to the official site of the U.S. Department of Education, "www.ed.gov." Go to the left side of the page and click on "quick link."

Q: Is one kind of organization's accreditation better than another's?

A: In the United States, there are two types of accreditation: regional and specialized. Regional accreditation encompasses the entire institution; specialized accreditation is for a particular program within an institution or for an institution that has a highly specialized mission. To have confidence in an agency's accreditation, you will want to be sure that the agency has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. A list of recognized accreditation agencies can be found on the CHEA website referenced previously. The Embassy has no particular expertise on this matter. For information about accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, go to their website named above.

Q: Some schools have their own accreditation, and others are described as "branch campuses." What is a branch campus, exactly?

A: The U.S. Department of Education defines a "branch campus" as an off-campus or additional location program offered by an accredited institution. Branch campuses are explicitly evaluated as part of the accreditation process. A branch campus may not hold separate accreditation but may be encompassed within the accreditation of the "home" campus. For additional information about branch campus or off-campus accreditation, go to the site of the USDE's Library of Information for Financial Aid Professionals, "www.ifap.ed.gov."

Q: How do I know if the school I'm interested in attending is a "good" school?

A: What may be a good school for you might not be a good school for others. Prospective students need to make their own choices, based on their personal situations. There are several publications offering information about schools, admission criteria, competitiveness, cost of studies, campus facilities, etc. The Fulbright Commission in Athens can advise you where to look for these publications.

Q: How do I know if it's financially sound?

A: Accreditation is given when institutions and their programs provide continuous evidence of fiscal stability. Accreditation is withdrawn if an institution is not financially sound. Accreditation, however, is not a guarantee, and universities, like other institutions, are sometimes mismanaged. For information about the accreditation status of a specific institution, please check with the Fulbright Commission's educational advising office.

Back to US Embassy Homepage <http://www.usembassy.gr/>