



The Authoritative Voice of Specialized and Professional Accreditation

The Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) is dedicated to enhancing quality in higher education through specialized and professional accreditation. Accreditation is the public recognition awarded to academic programs that meet established educational standards. Accreditation assures that teaching, student achievement, curricula, academic support and other criteria meet certain levels of excellence and quality.

ASPA is comprised of organizations that evaluate programs and institutions of higher learning in more than 100 different specialized disciplines and professions, e.g., nursing, architecture, physical therapy and engineering.

Why is specialized/professional accreditation important?

Unlike *institutional accreditation*, which applies to a college or university as a whole, programmatic accreditation conducts an in-depth assessment of *specialized or professional programs* that may be available through a college, a university or an independent institution. Specialized and professional accreditation closely examines and evaluates measures of learning or competence that are fundamental to the discipline or profession.

Earning accreditation is a mark of distinction for any academic program. It represents high quality and a commitment to excellence.

Who benefits from programmatic accreditation?

Students – Accreditation provides a measure of educational quality, and in many professions, students are required to complete an accredited program of study in order to be eligible for certification or state licensure for practice.

Employers – Accreditation assures prospective employers that graduates come from a program or school where the content and quality satisfy established standards.

Educators & Institutions – Accreditation provides validation of higher education programs, as well as the opportunity for academic administrators, faculty and practitioners to build consensus on expected learning outcomes and graduate competencies.

Regulators & Lawmakers – Accreditation provides assurance that higher education programs are evaluated against nationally accepted standards and that program graduates are competent for entry into the workplace or for advanced practice. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education recognizes certain accrediting agencies as reliable authorities on the quality of education or training provided by accredited programs and institutions. Accreditation by a recognized accreditation agency may meet federal eligibility requirements or provide access to funding—the latter most typically in the form of student loans and scholarships.

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How does a specialized or professional program gain accreditation?

Any specialized or professional program of study seeking accreditation goes through a rigorous review process. It starts with self-evaluation and includes a comprehensive, on-site review and an ongoing process of continual improvement.

An important factor in the accreditation process is peer review by experts in the field of study. A team selected by the accrediting agency visits the institution or program to determine first-hand if the applicant meets established standards. Evaluators are typically volunteers who are a mix of practitioners and academics with expert knowledge in the specialized area under review.

While specific guidelines vary by agency, most accreditors will review the following areas:

- Teaching & Research
- Professional or Specialized Program Curriculum
- Ethics/Integrity
- Evaluation & Assessment of Outcomes
- Faculty Qualifications
- Financial Resources
- Library, Information & Learning Resources
- Mission & Planning
- Organization & Administration
- Physical, Laboratory & Training Facilities
- Student Support Services

About ASPA

A nonprofit association, ASPA provides a collaborative forum dedicated to assuring the quality of specialized and professional higher education programs and schools. It is the only unified, national voice that solely represents specialized and professional accrediting bodies in the United States. ASPA members set national educational standards for 100 different specialized disciplines and professions. They ensure students receive a quality higher education, consistent with standards for entry or advanced practice in a field or discipline. Through an emphasis on self-evaluation and peer review, accreditation plays an important role in continuous quality improvement in higher education.

In addition, ASPA:

- Facilitates collaboration among programs, institutions and accrediting organizations
- Promotes quality in higher education and accreditation through discussion, advocacy and educational offerings
- Encourages a focus on student learning and graduate competencies
- Advocates for the integrity, independence and autonomy of accrediting organizations and their affiliated institutions and programs

Each ASPA member organization has a common commitment to uphold standards that are rigorous, comprehensive and outcome-based, with specific attention directed to the professional or special-purpose curriculum.



Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors

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