

Program Accreditation

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What does it mean that a program is accredited?

Most health career programs should be accredited, which means they have been reviewed by members of the profession from outside of the college or university offering the program. After the review, the program is awarded accreditation if the reviewers determine that it meets the high standards set by the accrediting agency. The standards include things like: Are the course materials well-designed and up-to-date and do the courses prepare students adequately for the career? Are the faculty members well-qualified to teach in the program? Are the facilities – like classrooms, labs, and clinical sites – adequate to prepare students to function in today’s healthcare institutions? Are there enough financial resources dedicated to the program so that it can be successful? What is the passing rate for graduates who take the licensure or certification exams at the end of the program? Do the faculty and administration continually review the program and look for ways to improve it? Does the program treat applicants for the program fairly and without bias? Do the students have the right to appeal decisions?

If a program is accredited, you know that it meets the standards for quality set by the accrediting agency.

Is it required that programs be accredited?

Technically, accreditation is always voluntary for a program. However, in practice it sometimes is so important that it truly is not something a program would decide not to do. For example, in some professions, only students who graduate from accredited programs are allowed to take the licensure or certification exam that is necessary to practice the profession. For instance, dental hygiene graduates can only become licensed to practice in Illinois if they graduate from an accredited program.

In some programs, accreditation is not required by state licensure laws, but is important when it comes to finding a job. Students with an associate degree in Health Information can only take the certification exam (which is not for state licensure but is recognized by employers) if they graduate from an accredited program. The certification is an important credential when the graduate is applying for a job.

For other programs, accreditation is not required, although it is a good indication that the program meets the high standards of the professional group that is the accrediting agency.

In a few programs, there is no accreditation or the accreditation standards are still new and not yet very standardized or recognized.

What does it mean if a program isn’t accredited?

A program may not be accredited for several reasons: there may not be an accreditation for that profession; the college might not want the expense of accreditation and it may not be required for licensure or certification; or the program may be new and has not yet met the standards for

accreditation. In rare cases, a program may have applied to be accredited but been denied or lost its accreditation.

How can I find out if a program is accredited?

You should investigate what accrediting agency accredits the profession you are interested and go to their website. The website will have a “search for an accredited program” function on it. To find out the accrediting agency for the profession, you can check the website <http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>. Find the career you’re interested in and then look at the “Resources” web-page for that career.

If you are looking at a catalog of a college that has a program you are interested in, the description of the program will always include a statement regarding its accreditation if it is accredited.

What does “pending” accreditation mean?

When new programs are established, they usually have to wait a year or two to apply to be accredited. After they apply, the process takes months for a final decision. During that time the program may state that its accreditation status is “pending.”

Once a program is accredited, is it reviewed again?

Different accrediting agencies have different timelines for re-accreditation. In some cases, a program might get 7 years of accreditation. After the 7 years is up, the program applies for re-accreditation and gets reviewed again. In other cases, the timeframe is more frequent.

What are the advantages of going to a program that is accredited?

If you graduate from a program that is accredited, you can usually be sure that your degree will be recognized as coming from a high-quality program. It also means that you will be eligible to take the licensure and/or certification exams that may be needed to successfully find a job. If you move from the area where you went to school, the college where you received your education might not be familiar to the employers in your new area, so having a degree from a program that is accredited is even more important.

What are some of the accrediting agencies I should look for?

To find out the accrediting agency for the various health professions, you can check the website <http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>. Find the career you’re interested in and the look at the “Resources” page for that career. Some of the accrediting agencies that accredit College of Lake County’s health programs are:

Dental Hygiene	American Dental Association
Health Information Technology	Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education
Medical Imaging	Joint Review Committee on Educational Radiologic Technology
Nursing	National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission

Phlebotomy	National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences
Surgical Technology	Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs