

## Accreditation/Authorization Overview

Accreditation can be a very complicated and confusing topic, but here are some basic things to consider. In that regard, we'll start with current Ohio policies. Only institutions that intend to offer degrees, offer degrees or work creditable toward degrees in Ohio (i.e., of any kind) must have authorization to operate in Ohio from the Ohio Board of Regents or Ohio's State Board of Career Colleges & Schools (SBCCS). SBCCS regulates all for-profit schools that do not offer programming above the associate degree level. Any for-profits that wish to offer programming above the associate's level must also seek authorization by the Ohio Board of Regents as well as all others.

Therefore, Ohio Board of Regents regulates all degree programming offered by Ohio's publics as well as all degree programming offered by all other institutions delivering programming within the state's borders (e.g., all non-profits, all for profits that offer programming above the associate level or that voluntarily seek Regents authorization, and all out-of-state institutions, both public and private). Regents policy is not to regulate out-of-state institutions that offer online degree work that does not include any activities within the state's borders (e.g., classes, solicitation, tutoring, workshops, licensure pieces, and so forth). Therefore, all degree programming delivered in Ohio or online institutions engaging in any physical activities creditable toward degrees in Ohio should hold a Certificate of Authorization by the Ohio Board of Regents and/or the State Board of Career Colleges & Schools. However, when considering online programs there are a couple of things that should be identified by the prospective student.

First, one should clarify whether an institution holds appropriate accreditation/authorization in their state of origin/administrative headquarters, and also whether the institution holds appropriate national or regional accreditation. Any institution that holds appropriate state and either national or regional accreditation will typically list that information on their websites. You can go to the US Department of Education's (USDE) website and find a listing of all accreditors recognized by USDE, or you can find the *Higher Education Directory* that also lists such information as well as more information about accreditation. If an accreditor is not recognized by USDE, then such an accreditor would not be recognized by the State of Ohio or by most other states. Accordingly, recognition of degrees and transfer of credit would be issues of concern with institutions not holding such recognized accreditation and for students seeking federal student loans. USDE demands that institutions must hold regional or national accreditation recognized by USDE as one criteria for dispersing federal student loans.

There are six regional accreditors in the US, and they are identified by their names. In Ohio, we are in the North Central Assoc region. The others are the New England Assoc, Middle States Assoc, Southern Assoc, Western Assoc, and the Northwest Assoc. There are several national accreditors like ACICS, ACCSCT, DETC, ABHE, ABHES, ACCET, ATS, and some others. If you Google these acronyms, you can find their websites and more information about each. Some of the above only accredit religious institutions/programming, some others only accredit institutions that deliver health related programs, and others accredit more comprehensive institutions. Historically, the

nationally accepted preference/standard is for regional accreditation, although that preference does not infer anything about a difference in quality—only in identified standards. All Ohio public institutions as well as all other non-profits in Ohio are regionally accredited. The national accreditors more typically accredit for-profit institutions and especially those we commonly refer to as career schools. All of these latter types of institutions in Ohio must hold national or regional accreditation recognized by USDE, as that is a requirement of Ohio's State Board of Career Colleges & Schools. Examples of those were provided previously.

It is important to note that various states do not regulate religious institutions or certain degree programs offered by religious institutions. Some of these institutions may list accreditation from an agency not recognized by USDE (e.g., a national, international or even a professional/specialized agency). Therefore, such institutions may be operating legitimately in a particular state, but degrees from such institutions or coursework would probably not be recognized in states that do not have such religious exemptions or do not recognize an accreditor not recognized by USDE.

Also, it is important to note that some states exempt all private as well as private religious institutions from all state regulation, while others may have certain regulatory requirements for only specialized programming. For example, Indiana does not regulate private institutions, but it does regulate all teacher education programs delivered by both its public and Indiana-based private institutions. Therefore, a private institution in Indiana like the University of Indianapolis is required to hold state approval for its teacher education program, but it is not required to hold authorization from the Indiana Commission on Higher Education that regulates all of Indiana's public institutions like Indiana University and Purdue University.

Once you've determined the accreditation status of an institution, you should then consider whether a particular program of interest will satisfy your needs and if it can be considered a quality program. Often, quality can be assumed by programs located in appropriately accredited institutions that also hold professional/specialized accreditation for programs like nursing, physical therapy, teacher education, and so forth. Many fields and disciplinary areas also require professional/specialized accreditation for licensure and/or certification purposes. For example, teacher education programs in Ohio must be either TEAC or NCATE accredited (national teacher education professional/specialized accreditors) as well as authorized by the Ohio Department of Education and authorized by the Ohio Board of Regents, nursing programs in Ohio must hold Ohio Board of Nursing authorization as well as a national professional/specialized nursing accreditation recognized by USDE and be authorized by either the Ohio Board of Regents or the Ohio State Board of Career Colleges and Schools, physical therapy programs must hold professional/specialized national accreditation recognized by USDE in order for physical therapy students to sit for licensure in that area in Ohio and those programs must also be authorized by the Ohio Board of Regents to operate in Ohio, and so forth. Once again, only professional/specialized accreditation recognized by USDE should be your benchmark as well as appropriate state authorization. You can also find more information

about professional/specialized agencies on the USDE website, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation website (CHEA), or in the *Higher Education Directory*.

### **Accreditation & Teacher Education Licensure Programs**

It is additionally important to note that teacher licensure programs must have authorization from both the Ohio Board of Regents and the Ohio Department of Education to engage in any on-site initial licensure activities in Ohio. For example, the teacher education program at Ohio University or any other Ohio public institution is NCATE accredited, authorized by the Ohio Department of Education and by the Ohio Board of Regents, and the Ohio University is regionally accredited. Consequently, the University holds all required accreditations/ authorizations to deliver a teacher education program in Ohio and to administer the initial teacher education licensure components in the state of Ohio (e.g., student teaching). Therefore, when considering teacher education programs in Ohio, one would seek information to verify that a program is appropriately accredited by a teacher education professional/specialized accreditor like NCATE or TEAC, and that the institution is appropriately authorized to operate in the state and appropriately accredited by a regional accreditor as that is the policy in Ohio.

For out of state online teacher education programs, those programs that do not hold professional/specialized accreditation or Ohio authorizations would not be permitted to engage in initial licensure activities in Ohio or engage in activities in Ohio, nor would work completed in such unauthorized activity be accepted toward licensure in Ohio. On the other hand, it can be assumed that out of state teacher education programs that do not hold professional/specialized accreditation are not required to do so under their state's policies. Consequently, such programs may be operating appropriately in their respective states without the additional professional/specialized accreditation. However, when a particular program also holds professional/specialized accreditation, it may be assumed the program has met the standards of the various accrediting bodies, whereas such cannot be assumed for teacher education programs that don't hold the same accreditations. Once again, it should be noted that without appropriate Ohio approvals/authorizations, students engaged in such online teacher education cannot complete any initial licensure activities in Ohio like student teaching, nor would such work be accepted in Ohio for licensure.

### **Conclusion**

This is a fairly brief summary, and of course, there's much more to know, but this briefing should provide a decent framework to use when searching for a college/university program. Additionally, be advised that the Ohio Learning Network (OLN) lists most all programs/courses delivered in online formats from Ohio's institutions that hold appropriate accreditations. If you need more information or wish to inquire about an out of state program, please feel free to contact the Ohio Board of Regents, and we'll do our best to support your efforts.