



# The Role of the Triad in Higher Education

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# What is the Triad?

The "triad" concept of educational oversight asserts a balanced relationship of regulatory responsibility between the accreditor, the state government, and the federal government.

- Accreditation ensures that programs and institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of **quality in teaching and learning** and also promotes **continuous improvement** in those areas.
- State governments issue **licenses** to institutions that operate in the state and are the primary providers of **consumer protection** for citizens within the state. They also promote cooperation and collaboration among state institutions of higher education. How much control they exert over higher education differs from state to state.
- The federal government focuses on the **administrative and fiscal integrity** of its **student financial aid programs**. By requiring institutions to be both accredited and recognized by the state, the federal government assures that quality and consumer protection are in place in order for an institution to participate in federal student funding programs.



# The Role of Accreditation

From the US Department of Education's Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs:

The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions and/or programs of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. Accrediting agencies, which are private educational associations of regional or national scope, develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Institutions and/or programs that request an agency's evaluation and that meet an agency's criteria are then "accredited" by that agency.

The Department provides oversight over the postsecondary accreditation system through its review of all federally-recognized accrediting agencies. The Department holds accrediting agencies accountable by ensuring that they enforce their accreditation standards effectively.

# Types of Accreditors

- **Institutional Accreditation**

Institutional accreditation normally applies to an entire institution, and indicates that each entity of a school contributes to the achievement of the school's objectives.

- **Programmatic Accreditation**

A specialized/programmatic accreditation normally applies to the evaluation of specified programs, departments or small entities within the larger institution. A unit receiving a specialized accreditation could be as large as a college within a university system, or as small as a curriculum within a specified program of study.

# National vs. Regional Accreditation

- National accreditors typically carry a thematic approach to the institutions that they accredit, such as legal programs (ABA) career and technical programs (ACCSC), medical programs (ABHES), or distance education programs (DEAC).
- Regional accreditors generally focus on a geographical area of the country and provide accreditation for any institution within that geographical region (SACS, NECHE, MSCHE, etc.).

# Standards of Accreditation

The Department of Education requires accreditors to publish standards of accreditation that guide the schools on quality of programs and instruction, observe those qualities through on-site evaluations, verify information submitted by institutions through third-party audits, and conduct surprise visits to institutions. All institutions must measure school quality based on:

1. Management and Administration
2. Academic Programs
3. Faculty and Educational Administration
4. Marketing and Advertising
5. Admissions Policies and Practices
6. Student Services
7. Student Learning Assessment and Student Outcomes
8. Facilities Management
9. Distance Education

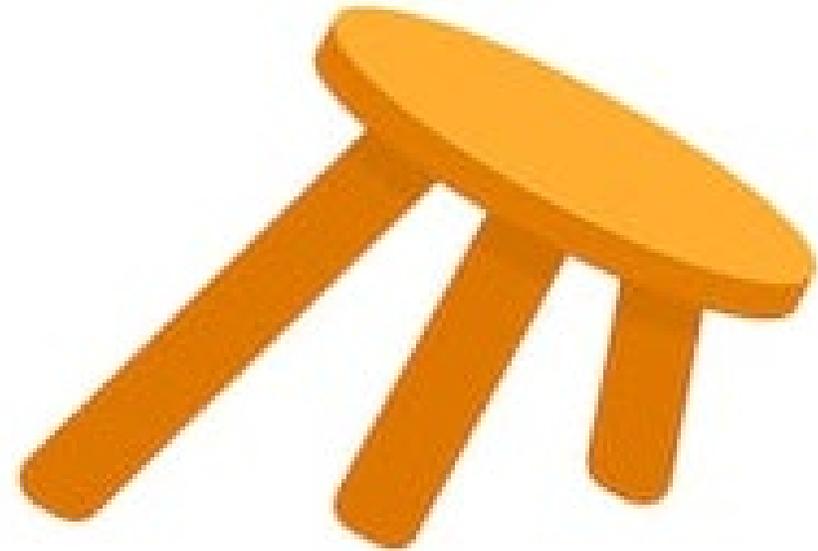
# Players within an Accrediting Body

1. **Accreditation Staff**, led by an Executive Director, oversee the processes and procedures of the accrediting body.
2. **Onsite Visitation Teams**, including staff members, school practitioners, educational specialists, and occupational specialists, conduct on-site visits to all institutions within an accreditation cycle.
3. **Board Members** of the Accrerator, consisting both of member schools (peer institutions) and the education community (public commissioners) read the team summary reports from team visits and choose to accredit, deny accreditation, require reporting, or place schools on probation, based on what the teams found at the schools.

# Keeping the Stool Balanced

Essential to the concept of the triad is a mutual respect between agencies.

- Accreditor: Institutional Quality and Continuous Improvement
- State: Institutional Recognition through Licensing and Consumer Protection
- Federal Government: Financial Integrity and Federal Aid Program Administration



# How Federal Agencies Typically Respond

- Deference to the Roles of the Triad
- Department of Homeland Security's Student Exchange and Visitor's Program (SEVP) provides students visas to schools that are recognized by the state, accredited by an accreditor, and in good standing with the US Department of Education.
- Only if any of the legs of the triad are not in place are additional quality control measures required (such as ESL schools).



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