

WHAT IS AN ACCREDITED COLLEGE



Written by EditorsChoice

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You have either decided to get your bachelor degree online, or you are seriously considering it – but you have concerns about legitimacy. How valuable are online degrees, anyway? And what does “accreditation” have to do with it?

There are valid concerns about [online business administration degrees](#) and many questions regarding [online business administration schools](#). First of all, you should know that the majority of online, or “virtual” universities are extension programs administered by traditional “brick-and-mortar” institutions, a great number of which are quite well-known and have strong academic reputations. It is unfortunately true that the Internet has its share of fly-by-night diploma mills and con artists, but with a little due diligence, one can readily detect and avoid them. Boise State University, Boston University, Cal State Northridge, Gonzaga, University of Louisville, Vanderbilt University and even “ivy league” schools like Cornell are all examples of old, established institutions that feature accredited online college degree programs.

In addition to the venerable, established colleges and universities, there are newer schools that have literally pioneered the field of offering the college course online. Phoenix University is one of these. Founded a little over thirty years ago, Phoenix University offers very flexible schedules and learning formats through over 190 campuses across the nation.

So – what is accreditation? It means that an academic institution has met certain standards of rigor and excellence. In the U.S., accreditation is essentially a peer-review process, conducted by people in the academic field employed by private “accrediting agencies” which the federal government has deemed to be “reliable authorities.” The standards are broad, but essentially are based on evaluations of the institutions resources and how those are allocated; admission requirements for students; level of student support services; qualification and credentials of faculty; and the rigor and quality of academic course offerings and requirements.

Generally, an accreditation is valid for a set period of time, after which the institution must reapply. Some institutions do not qualify because of an absence of particular courses or requirements: for example, some religious Bible colleges do not offer science courses or do not require students to take them; for this reason, such schools are not accredited. Unless you plan on a missionary career or one in the ministry of a particular religious sect, it is well to avoid such colleges, as a degree from an unaccredited institution pulls very little weight with employers or other institutions.

That brings us to the subject of how to detect “diploma mills” and confidence games. Red flags include words and phrases such as “pursuing accreditation,” “chartered,” “licensed,” “registered,” “recognized,” “authorized” and/or “approved” when used without the word “accredited.” If a school is truly accredited, this information should be very prominent on the prospectus.

In addition, since accreditation agencies are private corporations and (as Americans have learned since 2001) such corporations work very hard to milk the U.S. taxpayer out of every dime they can get, it is important to make sure that the agency responsible for accreditation has been screened and authorized through the U.S. Department of Education. The USDoe maintains a listing of legitimate accrediting agencies at both national and regional levels.

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Anne Harvester works at admissions for a top business administration school. She provides students with answers about earning a bachelor degree online, what accredited online colleges are, and what types of business administration careers are available.

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