

Accreditors in the US may be “recognized” or granted recognition status upon demonstration of compliance with established standards set by an external agency. Many accreditors affirm that just as they hold educational programs to a set of quality standards, it is important that they undergo periodic reviews of their own level of quality.

Accreditors are not required to be recognized in order to accredit programs or institutions.

	US Secretary of Education	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Recognition Entity	Secretary of Education recognition indicates that accreditors “are reliable authorities on the quality of education or training provided by the programs and institutions they accredit.” Accreditation by recognized accreditors allows academic programs and institutions to access federal programs such as student loans and scholarships. “Recognized by the Secretary...” is the correct term; “recognized by USDE” is often used as shorthand.	The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a non-governmental membership organization of institutions of higher education. CHEA’s primary focus is quality assurance and quality improvement. Accrediting organizations that seek CHEA recognition must demonstrate the quality of their activities and the pertinence and value of their activities to higher education and the public interest.
Eligibility for Recognition	There must be a federal link (laws or federal programs) that requires recognition, such as Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) for federal student aid, and non-HEA programs related to student loans and residencies, among others.	Accreditors must accredit a majority (at least 50%) of institutions or programs that confer degrees at the associate degree level or higher in order to be eligible for CHEA recognition.
History	The first federal requirements for the recognition of accreditors were published in 1952 with the passing of the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act. Since then, several other laws were passed that include requirements for recognition of accreditors, and the authority for and responsibility of recognition by the Secretary of the US Department of Education flow from the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. This legislation is scheduled to undergo periodic comprehensive reauthorization, usually at five-year intervals, although the last significant reauthorization was in 2008. Extensive revisions occurred when the HEA was reauthorized in 1992, wherein amendments mandated the use of a negotiated rule-making process to develop the implementing regulations and outlined the process to be used for recognizing accrediting agencies.	The National Commission on Accrediting and the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education merged to form the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) which began operating in 1975. COPA was dissolved in 1993 and the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) began operating in 1994. It did not assume the professional development and advocacy functions that COPA had. Also, college and university leaders formed the National Policy Board on Higher Education Institutional Accreditation in 1993 that evolved into the Presidents Work Group on Accreditation, which proposed a new group - CHEA - during 1995-96. CHEA held its first official meeting in fall 1996. CORPA then transferred its recognition authority to CHEA. Recognition requirements were adopted in 1998 and accreditors were recognized starting in 2001.



	US Secretary of Education	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Process	New applicants are required to have been in operation for 2 years and have accredited programs or institutions. They may consult with Department (ED) staff prior to submitting petitions with evidence of compliance with the recognition requirements. ED staff review the petitions and samples of documentation and policies, and observe a decision-making meeting and/or site visit. Areas of non-compliance are identified, and the accreditor has an opportunity to supply more evidence or update policies or procedures. A final staff report with a recommendation about recognition is made public shortly before the public session.	New applicants for recognition must have accredited at least two programs or institutions at the time of application. They may consult with CHEA staff prior to and during the process of preparing petitions for submission with evidence of compliance with the standards for recognition. CHEA reserves the right to attend a decision-making meeting of the accreditor’s governing board without notice.
Public Session	In a public session, accreditors meet with the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) - 18 volunteers from the world of higher education appointed by Congress and the Secretary of Education. Accreditors are questioned about their compliance with the recognition requirements (and about anything else in which the committee members may have an interest). The committee then makes a recommendation concerning the recognition status of the accreditor. The Senior Department official then reviews the Department staff and NACIQI recommendations before coming to a final decision on the accreditor. The public is given the opportunity to provide third party comments before and during the meeting.	In a public session, accreditors meet with the CHEA Committee on Recognition (CoR) - 9 volunteers from the world of higher education recommended by CHEA staff and appointed by the CHEA Board. The CoR poses questions that are mostly related to compliance with the recognition standards. The CoR then goes into closed session and may recommend to the CHEA Board for recognition, denial of recognition or withdrawal of recognition. Independently the CoR may: approve Change in Scope, Interim Reports and Follow-up Reports; request additional information; defer decision-making about recognition; and modify the review cycle. The public is given the opportunity to provide third party comments before and during the meeting.
Recognition Cycle	Accreditors are granted 5 years of recognition if determined to fully comply with requirements. For substantial compliance, submission of a monitoring report may be required which is addressed by Department staff. Substantial non-compliance may require a compliance report in 12 months which will be reviewed at the subsequent NACIQI meeting.	Accreditors are granted 7 years of recognition if they are determined to fully comply with the standards. An interim report will then be required at the mid-point of the term of recognition. If deferred, accreditors have a year to respond to the deferral otherwise recognition will be denied if they do not withdraw their application.
More Information	Accreditation: Postsecondary Education Institutions U.S. Department of Education	Home Council for Higher Education Accreditation (chea.org)