



Certification to Operate a Postsecondary Institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia

- I. The Code of Virginia (§ 23.1-217) requires that any entity offering postsecondary education in Virginia be *authorized* to do so by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). The terminology used in code for this act of authorization is “certification.” Thus, an institution authorized to provide postsecondary education in Virginia is said to be “certified to operate in Virginia.”
- II. Certification by SCHEV does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation of the postsecondary institution. The issuance of a certificate to operate indicates that SCHEV has determined the institution is in compliance with regulation and law governing minimal conditions for operating a postsecondary institution in Virginia.
- III. A member of the public considering attending a school certified to operate in Virginia should employ the same means of evaluating its suitability for his/her educational goals as when considering any other educational provider. The SCHEV website provides broad guidance on finding a suitable college. See: [Exploring Opportunities](#)
- IV. A prospective student should not sign an agreement to attend a certified institution until s/he has received satisfactory answers to all questions that may have a bearing on this decision. While factors affecting a student’s decision to attend one school over another may vary, the following should be considered when making a decision:
 - Is the postsecondary school in good standing with the state agency that authorizes it to operate? Alerts regarding the status of Virginia institutions will be posted on SCHEV’s website.
 - What is the number and nature of complaints against the postsecondary school over the last five years? This information is posted on SCHEV’s website.
 - If the school is a degree-granting institution, is it accredited by an agency recognized by the US Department of Education (USED)? Accreditation agencies are listed on the USED website at this link [Accrediting Agencies](#). Is the institution in good standing with its accrediting agency? Actions taken against accredited institutions may be found on the accrediting agency’s website. If you find that the school is not accredited, it may be a new school in the process of obtaining accreditation. Note that credits from unaccredited institutions seldom transfer to other institutions.
 - What is the estimated cost of the program and the total indebtedness the student is likely to incur? It is a good idea to research entry level salaries in relevant occupations to find out whether any loans taken out can be paid back without hardship. Having a realistic sense of the cost of the education versus probable salary will enable a student to judge whether the program of study is worth pursuing at the chosen institution. The Occupational Outlook Handbook is a good

source for salary information for hundreds of jobs/occupations. See: [Occupational Outlook](#)

- If the student intends to enroll in a program that leads to licensure, what is the school's pass rate on the licensure exam? Is the school on probation for not meeting the pass rate? This information may be obtained through the relevant licensing agency.
- V. Certified schools in Virginia are required to adhere to a range of policies designed to protect students and their investments in postsecondary education. Virginia regulations specify requirements for faculty qualifications, admissions, satisfactory program completion and student record retention. Regulations also require that schools disclose important information, such as transfer policy; refund policy; grievance policy; school accreditation status; financial aid program information; and tuition, fees and other related charges.

SCHEV regularly reviews laws and regulations and proposes changes to strengthen student protections. During the 2017 legislative session, a bill was passed that requires certified institutions to enter an enrollment agreement with each student. The regulation for the bill specifically details the elements, including all disclosures that must be part of an enrollment agreement.

The SCHEV Office of Private Postsecondary Education (PPE) is charged with the oversight of private and out-of-state postsecondary institutions operating in Virginia. PPE's goals include protecting the citizens of the Commonwealth from fraudulent or substandard educational institutions; ensuring institutions certified to operate in Virginia meet minimal academic and administrative standards; investigating student complaints; and securing student academic records from closed schools.

We welcome questions, comments or concerns from the public.