

Explanation of Certification

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia is responsible for developing procedures to which certain private and all out-of-state postsecondary institutions must adhere in order to receive approval to confer degrees, certificates or diplomas in Virginia. This approval process is called certification.

The Private Postsecondary Education (PPE) section of SCHEV is responsible for reviewing applications for initial certification from postsecondary institutions desiring to operate in Virginia, as well as processing annual recertification applications from postsecondary institutions currently certified to operate in Virginia.

The PPE staff is charged with, but not limited to:

- Designing measures to ensure that all certified postsecondary educational institutions meet minimal academic standards.
- Ensuring certain consumer protections for students pursuing educational opportunities at the certified institutions.
- Providing information to assist persons who rely on postsecondary degrees, diplomas, and certificates in judging the competence of the certified institutions and the individuals who complete programs of study at such institutions.

The PPE staff attempts to foster and improve the educational programs and services of the certified institutions while protecting citizens from fraudulent or substandard operations. PPE staff also mediates complaints between students and certified institutions and serves as the repository of academic records in the event a certified school closes or its certification to operate in Virginia is revoked.

Private and out-of-state postsecondary educational institutions that are certified to operate in Virginia must meet certain standards of operations that include faculty preparation, financial stability, maintenance of student records, library and classroom facilities, procedures for student admissions and graduation, organizational and administration standards of operation, and consistency of a school's state purpose with the proposed offerings.

Certified institutions are required to re-certify that they meet these standards on an annual basis. To ensure compliance with the standards, PPE staff conducts random programmatic and financial audits of the certified institutions. Certification is not the same as accreditation; however, an institution must obtain state approval before seeking accreditation.

Certain private institutions are exempt from the requirements of certification or approval by SCHEV. They include:

- Institutions whose primary purpose is religious or theological in nature (such schools must apply for status of religious exemption);
- Degree-granting institutions that were chartered, formed or originated in Virginia and that have operated under the same ownership for 10 consecutive years and have remained in good standing with the U.S. Department of Education and its accrediting body;
- Institutions that are regulated by other Commonwealth of Virginia or federal agencies;

- Schools of fine arts or other avocational courses that are conducted solely to further artistic appreciation and talent, or for personal development or information.

SCHEV has limited or no regulatory authority over institutions that are exempt from certification. Before enrolling in any institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia, students are encouraged to determine the school's regulatory relationship with SCHEV or other state regulatory agencies. Certain consumer-protection provisions required by certified schools are not present at or required by exempt institutions.

Other state agencies that regulate postsecondary education in Virginia:

- [Board of Nursing](#) – CNA, LPN and nursing programs.
- [Board of Pharmacy](#) – Pharmacy-technician programs.
- [Board for Barbers and Cosmetology](#) – Cosmetology, barbering, wax technician, hair braiding, body-piercing and aesthetic programs.
- [Department of Labor and Industry](#) – Apprenticeships programs.