

ETHICAL INTEGRITY in EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS and ATTRIBUTION

In 2007 the Assemblies of God saw the growing lack of integrity among Pentecostal-charismatic ministers regarding higher education. There was an increasing willingness to use unaccredited “degree mills” to obtain so-call college or graduate degrees. The title of “doctor” begin to proliferate among charismatic and some Pentecostal ministers. Claiming “masters” or “doctoral” degrees from these unaccredited schools was a serious breach of integrity.

Individuals and churches were creating “accreditation mills”, so-called accrediting agencies which were *fraudulent* organizations not recognized by any legitimate authorities. These accreditation mills then proceeded to “accredit” false “diploma / degree mills”, fake schools that will offer “degrees” for taking simplistic, “courses” that normally have less content than a traditional Sunday School class.

All of this was a form of fraud, an attempt to claim educational accomplishment – earned degrees – by people who had not actually done the hard work of attending legitimate, fully accredited schools and earning real degrees. **In legitimate ministerial circles and among legitimate Christian denominations, such practices have always been considered highly unethical. It amounts to telling and living a lie.**

Recognizing this growing fraud among independent charismatic – and some Pentecostal – ministers, the Assemblies of God amended their national Bylaws to forbid Assemblies of God ministers from engaging in this practice.

IN THIS SESSION of RELATIONSHIPS and ETHICS in Ministry, we will **FIRST** look at the **IMPORTANCE** of accreditation, and then **SECOND** at the official Assemblies of God ethical standard on education.

ACCREDITATION: DOES IT MATTER IF MY SCHOOL OF CHOICE IS NOT ACCREDITED?

There is one important item, often overlooked or not understood, that you should have on your checklist when considering which school is best for you, and that is accreditation. **Accreditation matters!**

Receiving and maintaining a legitimate accreditation means that the college or university has *gone through a thorough process of evaluation at all levels and meets specific quality standards*

and criteria to ensure that students are receiving a proper education, as required by the accrediting body. Attending a school that is not accredited at all can mean leaving your education and your future up to chance. Schools that are not legitimately accredited are held to few or no standards or regulations.

Not all schools applying for regional or national accreditation meet the criteria to receive such accreditation.

Before deciding to attend a non-accredited school there are a few things to consider:

Credit transfer: Credits from a non-accredited institution will not be accepted for transfer to a regionally accredited school because non-accredited schools are not held to the same standard as regionally accredited schools.

Cost (time/money): Earning a degree is hard work; it can take months or years to complete and often comes with a large financial investment. Getting a degree from a program that is not accredited can set a student back years and cost thousands of dollars.

Financial aid: Attending a non-accredited school also means that students will be ineligible for any government or military financial aid for tuition costs. That can lead to large out-of-pocket expenses for the duration of the program and many years beyond completion.

Employment: Using a non-accredited institution will make it harder to use your degree to find a job after graduation. Having a degree from a non-accredited school will put you behind everyone who has earned a degree from an accredited school. Employers know that hiring someone with a degree from an unaccredited school is a risky move.

Licensing: Depending on your field of study, it may be required that you used an accredited program. Specialized accreditation of specific programs in a school indicates that a specific degree program (i.e. nursing, accounting, COUNSELING, EDUCATION/TEACHING) at a school lives up to certain standards of that field. Having a specialized accreditation does not give accreditation to the other programs in the college.

Credits taken and “degrees” earned at non-accredited schools will NOT transfer into Assemblies of God colleges, universities, and seminaries. They will NOT satisfy the coursework requirements for Assemblies of God ministerial credentials. You will have wasted your time and money and learned far less than you thought.

To avoid issues like these, future students should do extensive research on their schools of interest before they enroll, or ask a professional educator or counselor whether the institution of their choice is accredited and what type of accreditation the institution has received or will receive.

WHAT SUSPICIOUS SIGNS SHOULD I WATCH OUT FOR WHEN RESEARCHING SCHOOLS?

There are often tell-tale signs that a “university” or “college” or “seminary” is trying to deceive potential students regarding accreditation.

FIRST, the mere words “university ... college ... seminary” and so forth do NOT mean that this is a REAL university, college, or seminary. These words may simply be used to deceive prospective students into thinking that this is a legitimate school.

SECOND, don’t equate a flashy website with legitimacy. Crooked organizations and people create hundreds of websites every day for businesses of all kinds that are basically scams, con jobs, deceitful ways of fooling unsuspecting people. A sharp looking website means nothing.

THIRD, watch to see if the website or literature for a school makes any of the following excuses about accreditation:

1. The website or literature ignores accreditation altogether,
2. The website or literature claims that accreditation is not important,
3. The website or literature claims that “government accreditation” is dangerous for Christian schools, or that it might restrict what they can teach. *This is two lies ... accreditation is granted by independent private agencies made up of professional educational experts and IS NOT run by any government. They accredit on the basis of professional educational standards and do NOT restrict doctrinal teaching by religious schools.*

If you see any of these kinds of warning signs – or anything similar – you should never use that “school” for anything. Never take any courses from that school, and never recommend it to anyone.

COMPARING REGIONAL and “NATIONAL” ACCREDITATION

There is a big difference between REGIONAL and so-called “national” accreditation. National accreditation may sound more important, but this is not the case. Here is a brief comparison of the two types of accreditation:

<u>Regional Accreditation</u>	<u>National Accreditation</u>
Generally viewed as more prestigious and reputable in both academia and corporate America	Not regarded as highly by the academic and corporate worlds
Transfer credits widely accepted by other institutions and professional licensing bodies	Transfer credits not typically accepted by other institutions and professional licensing bodies
Higher admissions standards; more selective acceptance	Less competitive; easier to get in
Typically more expensive	Typically cheaper
Prime candidates for tuition reimbursement programs	Often excluded from tuition reimbursement programs
Offers almost exclusively professor-led courses	More likely to have self-study courses

Regionally accredited schools are usually traditional colleges, universities, and seminaries with one or more physical campuses, while *nationally* accredited schools are generally vocational, trade, [*or they are religious schools that want to have low academic standards and higher profits.*](#)

Regional Accreditation

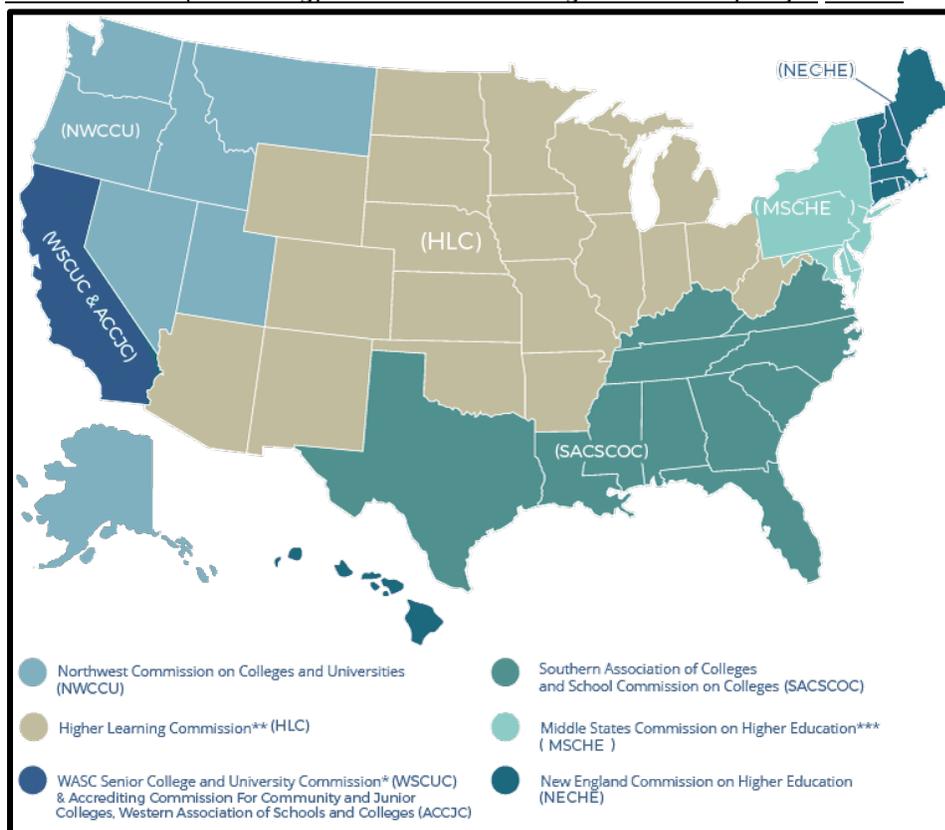
Regional accreditation helped lead the development of higher education in the U.S., has protected the integrity of the learning process and results, and has protected the interests of students.

There are six regional accreditation bodies in the United States:

1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS),
2. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC),
3. Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NASC),
4. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS),
5. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and
6. Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS) (Bray, 2013).

Legitimate colleges, universities, and seminaries will be accredited by one of the six accrediting bodies above or by **ABHE – the Association for Biblical Higher Education**. ABHE accredits institutions of higher learning based on standards of excellence in education and spiritual life and ministry. **ATS – the Association of Theological Schools** – accredits religious graduate schools that grant masters and doctoral degrees and meet required high standards for graduate education.

This image shows which accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA.org) accredits which region and its specific states.



Each region's requirements are similar if not identical.

Because of the high standards set by regional accreditation bodies, the academic and the corporate worlds consider regionally accredited schools to be the best institutions of higher learning.

One of the most important benefits of regionally accredited schools is the ability to transfer credits from different schools. Because all regionally accredited schools are held to very similar standards, they know that students who have attended a different school which is regionally accredited have received a quality education. This is why regionally accredited schools will generally accept credits transferred from another regionally accredited school and put it towards the transferring student's degree.

Whether delivered on campus or online, nearly all courses at a regionally accredited institution are led by instructors, adjuncts professors, or tenured professors. Very few self-study courses are

offered. The effects of accreditation will affect a student’s personal and professional life. Choosing the wrong education can cost money and time.

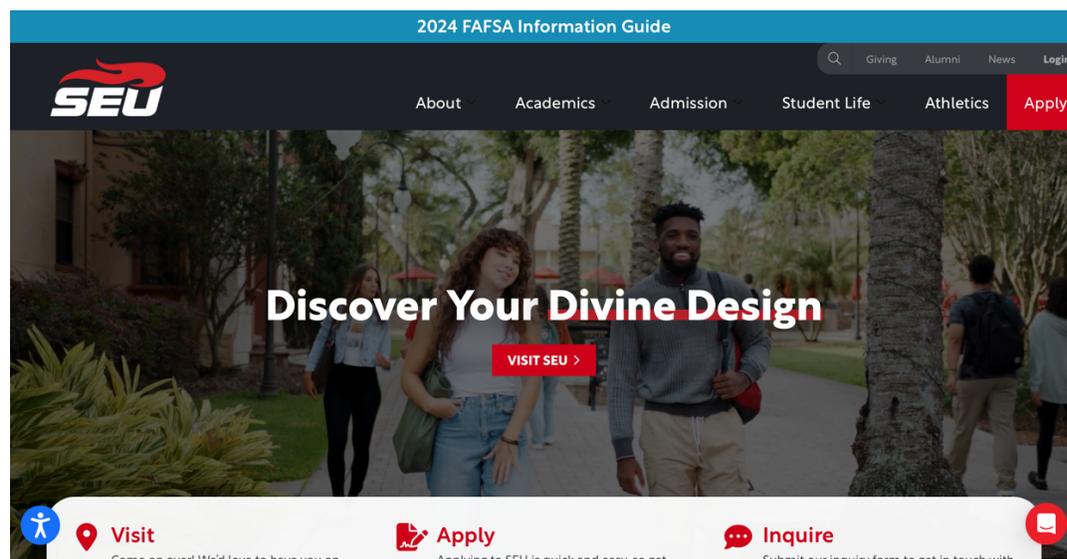
If a student has questions on the accreditation of a particular school, they should speak with an enrollment advisor to ensure the school of their choice carries proper accreditation to be a good match for their future personal and career goals.

(NOTE: Many decades ago the Assemblies of God created a distance education learning opportunity called **Berean School of the Bible (BSB)** for training AG ministers. BSB continues today as an institute level (non-accredited) subsidiary of our Global University, which is fully regional accredited. BSB is an officially vetted and approved **institute level** educational program that provides all of the coursework component required to for AG ministerial credentials. It has never claimed to be accredited, but provides students with a learning opportunity higher in quality and greater in content than the “degree mills” that falsely claim to be accredited.)

FURTHERMORE, ALWAYS REMEMBER: Some schools are simply much better than other schools having the same level of accreditation. Two schools might be fully accredited, BUT one of those schools might also provide a far better education and job opportunities than the other one. Some schools are simply better! Check all these things out carefully before choosing a school.

HOW DO I FIND THE ACCREDITATION STATUS OF A SCHOOL?

Key “school name” and “accreditation” into your search engine (such as Google) and it should find that information immediately. Or, on the school’s website click on the “accreditation” link (sometimes found under “About” or “Academics”) and the website for a LEGITIMATE institution will tell you their accreditation status in a very straightforward manner. The images below show this for **Southeastern University**:



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Accreditation

About » Accreditation

Southeastern University Southeastern University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, and doctorate degrees. Southeastern University also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Southeastern University may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).



You immediately see that SEU is accredited by SACS.

II. THE OFFICIAL ASSEMBLIES OF GOD ETHICAL STANDARD on EDUCATION

To ensure that our ministers, churches, and district and national offices do not use unaccredited or poorly accredited institutions, or claim “degrees” from such institutions, the General Council of the Assemblies of God amended its Bylaws to read as follows: ...

GENERAL COUNCIL of the ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

Constitution and Bylaws

BYLAWS

“ARTICLE VII. MINISTRY

Section 15. Integrity in Educational Credentials

a. Continuing education encouraged. Our ministers and churches are encouraged to seek continuing education, discipleship, spiritual formation, and training opportunities of all kinds, of all degrees of difficulty, of their own initiative or in cooperation with the district council and the General Council, but with great care always taken to properly understand and honestly describe all such training, certifications, degrees, and titles.

b. Using adequately accredited institutions. Because of the many questionable institutions offering unaccredited or deficient training and education, and since the General Council, our General Council schools, and our regional Assemblies of God universities are committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards of accreditation in education, we strongly encourage our ministers to meet their continuing education needs either through endorsed Assemblies of God institutions or through other reputable institutions having accreditation status at least equivalent to that held by our own regionally and nationally accredited schools, and to consult the district council or General Council offices if they have questions in these matters.

ARTICLE IX – DOCTRINES and PRACTICES DISAPPROVED

Section 13. Accountability in Educational Attribution

a. Attribution. In order to maintain our testimony of quality and integrity in educational credentials before the Church and the world, and to minimize the possibility of our ministers and churches being victimized by, or supporting, or perpetrating frauds in education or credentialing, we maintain certain standards for the attribution of degrees, certifications, and titles.

(1) *Attribution by ministers.* Our ministers shall refrain from listing, promoting, or attributing to themselves or others any degrees or titles conferred by institutions or organizations having, at the time of conferral, a formal accreditation status less than that of our appropriately corresponding Assemblies of God institutions (whether our institute, regional university, or seminary levels).

(2) *Attribution by the General Council.* No media, ministry, department, arm, or employee of the General Council shall list, attribute, or promote for any person, any degree or title conferred by an institution or organization having, at the time of conferral, a formal accreditation status less than that of our appropriately corresponding Assemblies of God institutions (whether our institute, regional university, or seminary levels).

(3) *Attribution by local churches.* We strongly encourage our ministers, boards, and churches to take great care to ensure that all ministers and church employees have actually earned the legitimately accredited education, training, and certification, as defined above, which they claim by their titles or degrees (such as counselor, therapist, doctor, and so on).

(4) *Attribution accepted.* All previously earned or conferred degrees prior to August 2007, from any institution whatsoever shall be fully accepted and grandfathered in.

b. Intentional failure to comply. Intentional refusal to comply with this ethical standard for educational credentials constitutes perpetrating a fraud upon the church and the world, personally and in the good name of the Assemblies of God, and the General Council disapproves of such practices.”

TO NOTE AGAIN, ... There are six regional accreditation bodies in the United States:

1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS),
2. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC),
3. Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NASC),
4. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS),
5. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and
6. Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS) (Bray, 2013).

Legitimate colleges, universities, and seminaries will be accredited by one of the six accrediting bodies above or by **ABHE – the Association for Biblical Higher Education**. ABHE accredits undergraduate institutions of higher learning (issuing bachelor’s degrees) based on standards of excellence in education and spiritual life and ministry.

One more legitimate organization that accredits graduate schools (theological seminaries and divinity schools) is **ATS – the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada**. **ATS** accredits Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish graduate schools of theology based on high standards of graduate education. Graduate schools possessing ATS accreditation will often also be accredited by a Regional accrediting association (such as SACS).

If an institution is NOT accredited by one of these agencies – SACS, WASC, NASC, NCACS, NEASC, MSACS, ABHE, or ATS, then you should NOT take any coursework from them until you have consulted with a higher education professional.

Claiming a degree – Bachelors, Masters, or Doctorate – from a school that is not accredited by one of the legitimate accrediting agencies listed above, is a violation of ethical integrity.

Using a title, such as “Doctor”, if not earned by a doctoral degree conferred by a legitimately accredited institution, is a violation of ethical integrity.

Failure to follow the General Council of the Assemblies of God Bylaws in the matter of Integrity in Education and Educational Attribution can lead to the loss of your ministerial credentials.