



## Frequently Asked Questions for Students

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## **What is the licensing role of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education?**

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education ("CHE" or "Commission") is the sole authority for licensing nonpublic educational institutions established in South Carolina and for those established elsewhere that want to operate, to solicit students for enrollment, or to confer degrees or other educational credentials in this State. The Commission establishes standards for postsecondary educational operations, authorizes operations, approves programs, issues, or denies licenses to, and oversees, all postsecondary educational institutions operating or soliciting in South Carolina. Additionally, the Commission regulates and enforces postsecondary laws and regulations, maintains the student records of institutions which close and have no other repository, issues certified transcripts, and investigates complaints against educational institutions under its jurisdiction.

## **What is a nonpublic educational [postsecondary] institution?**

A nonpublic educational [postsecondary] institution includes, but is not limited to, any educational entity operating or soliciting in South Carolina and is not owned or operated in whole or in part by the State of South Carolina offering resident or correspondence courses beyond the secondary school level to students upon the payment of tuition or fees.

## **What is the difference between licensure and accreditation?**

Licensure by the Commission is mandatory for postsecondary institutions to operate or solicit in SC, unless the institution is otherwise exempt. To obtain licensure and lawfully operate, postsecondary institutions must first meet certain standards of operation established by law. The Commission monitors the licensed schools by confirming minimum standards are met annually, conducting site visits, and by investigating student complaints.

Accreditation is a non-governmental and voluntary process of validation in which educational institutions of higher learning are evaluated by a peer review board whose members include faculty from various accredited colleges and universities. The Commission does not accredit institutions.

## **Which postsecondary institutions are licensed to operate or solicit in South Carolina?**

A listing of currently licensed institutions may be found on our website:

[Directory of Licensed Nondegree \(Occupational Training\) Institutions](#)

[Directory of Institutions Licensed to Recruit SC Residents](#)

[Directory of Massage Therapy Programs](#)

## **What if a postsecondary institution is operating without a license?**

State law requires that the Commission license most private institutions that operate or solicit in South Carolina. Licensed institutions are required to meet minimal standards and provide accurate and useful information to prospective and current students. The

Commission licenses institutions that offer credit bearing courses in addition to schools that offer programs that prepare students for an occupation such as pet groomer, massage therapist, nurse assistant, model, tax return preparer, or travel agent.

Some institutions are required to seek approval from other state agencies. These include cosmetology, barbering, truck driving, and real estate schools. South Carolina's public technical colleges and state colleges and universities are exempt from licensure. The following other types of institutions, programs, and courses are also exempt from the Commission's oversight:

- Degree-granting institutions chartered in SC before 1953
- Institutions whose sole purpose is religious or theological
- Recreational and personal development training
- Noncredit employer-sponsored employee-training programs
- Noncredit intensive review test preparation courses

Schools operating without a valid license issued by the Commission are in violation of the law and may be subject to civil penalties and fines. If you are aware of any educational entities that may be operating without a license, please contact Licensing staff [here](#).

### **Will my credits transfer to another institution?**

Any student interested in transferring credit hours should check with the receiving institution to determine to what extent, if any, credit hours can be transferred. The receiving institution has sole discretion as to whether credits transfer. Prior to enrollment, students are encouraged to determine whether their educational goals will be met through attendance at a particular institution.

### **How do I obtain my transcript from a closed institution?**

The Commission serves as the repository for some student records from licensed institutions that have closed. If an institution cannot provide for assignment of the records to another institution or agency, the Commission may seize the records and, as necessary, negotiate for assignment of the records to another institution or agency that will accept responsibility for their safety, maintenance, distribution, and, where appropriate, disposal. Typically, the only document on file at the Commission is an academic transcript.

Transcripts are certified copies of the academic record as they appeared on file upon the school's closing. Individuals can request copies of their transcript from the Commission by submitting a completed [Transcript Request Form](#). Mail the completed form with a nonrefundable transcript and/or record search fee of \$10.00 (check or money order only). Transcript requests will be processed within five to 10 business days upon receipt.

## **How do I file a complaint against a postsecondary institution?**

The Commission responds to formal complaints from students against public, independent non-profit, and proprietary institutions of higher education in South Carolina. However, the Commission has limited authority over public and non-profit independent colleges and universities and cannot offer legal advice or initiate court proceedings.

Any person having a complaint or grievance against an institution that is licensed by the Commission should make a reasonable effort to obtain satisfaction from the institution directly through the institution's established procedures. If a solution cannot be reached, the person may file a written complaint with the Commission [here](#). The complaint will be shared with the alleged violator for a formal response. After consideration of all information presented, the Commission may initiate an investigation of the information or complaint, attempt a settlement through mediation, or determine other actions. If the Commission dismisses a complaint, it shall give the complainant notice of the dismissal in writing.

## **What happens if my school closes?**

If your school should close without notice, please call our office, and notify us of the situation as soon as possible. A licensed school may close for any number of reasons, but by regulation, a school must give the Commission a minimum of seventy-two hours before such action.

## **What should I consider when choosing a field of study?**

Students are encouraged to think carefully about the type of career they'd like to pursue, and the professional requirements for that career, before enrolling in a postsecondary program. For current employment projections visit the United States Department of Labor website to view the Occupational Outlook Handbook [here](#).

## **What should I consider prior to enrolling in a postsecondary institution?**

There are many questions and concerns a prospective student may have prior to enrollment. Licensure indicates only that minimum standards have been met; it is not an endorsement or guarantee of quality. It is wise beforehand to inquire either by calling the school itself, call the Commission regarding licensure, visiting the school campus in person, talking with current and former students, researching the school online, or even calling the Better Business Bureau in the city/town where the school is located. Beware of educational opportunities that sound too good to be true.

Some of the areas of inquiry may be whether a school is licensed; it is in good standing with the state regulatory body; is it accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education; do the credits transfer to other postsecondary institutions; does it offer financial assistance to students who qualify; are the instructors approved to teach by the regulatory body; is there certification/licensure obtained upon completion of

the course or do students have the opportunity to test for certification/licensure after the successful completion of the course; are the facilities and equipment up-to-date; does it assist its graduates in locating job opportunities; does it offer refresher courses to its graduates; have there been any unresolved student complaints against the school filed with the regulatory body; and what type of job placement information is available for former graduates.

The U.S. Department of Education has some tips for students thinking about attending postsecondary institutions [here](#).

