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### Ensuring a Commitment to Quality Programs

In the university [mission statement](#), Stephen F. Austin State University pledges to every student that the institution will provide a “foundation for success.” This statement is followed by a declaration of what the university most values. Here the university maintains that it offers programs of sufficient quality to “empower each student to succeed.” Are these mere words used to market the university’s programs? How can a prospective student be reasonably confident that SFA can ensure this commitment? For over 100 years *accreditation* has been the key test for validating the threshold for academic quality.

### What is Accreditation?

The [Council For Higher Education Accreditation](#) (CHEA) offers this definition regarding the distinguishing value of accreditation.

“Accreditation is the primary means of assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions and programs in the United States. Active for the past 100 years, this private, voluntary system of self-examination and peer review has been central to the creation of a U.S. higher education enterprise that is outstanding in many respects.”

Accreditation is a voluntary process of self-regulation an institution or program earns by demonstrating compliance to standards and principles in a process of peer review. In the current climate of accountability, accreditation facilitates the measurement of student learning outcomes and overall institutional performance. Accreditation in the United States is non-governmental. No federal agency or other centralized authority exercises control over postsecondary accreditation. [The U.S Department of Education](#) does monitor the process and offers information to citizens about the reliability of the accreditation process.

### SFA Maintains Institutional and Specialized Program Accreditation

There are two basic types of accreditation: institutional and specialized. Institutional accreditation is awarded by one of [eight regional accrediting agencies](#). SFA is accredited by the [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools](#) (SACS). The most recent reaffirmation for this institution came in 2000 and is effective for 10 years.

Specialized accreditation generally applies to a single department, program or school that is part of the larger institution. There are also a number of program accreditations at SFA that communicate a higher order of attention to quality to both enrolled and prospective students. The value of accreditation within a discipline is a guarantee the curriculum offered meets the professional standards of that discipline. Generally, standards include, but are not limited to, important resources such as laboratory facilities, faculty qualifications, and library holdings.

The [Institutional Accreditation Office](#) has attempted to make a complete list of programs with specialized accreditation at SFA. This list includes accreditation across university divisions as well. Just one example of specialized compliance certification not within the division of Academic Affairs would be the certification of [Intercollegiate Athletics](#) by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Athletics certification is meant to ensure the university’s commitment to integrity in intercollegiate athletics. A list of [program affiliations](#) is posted on the IAO web site. An attempt will be made to keep this posting current.

### The Importance of Accreditation at SFA

The goal of voluntary self-regulation and accreditation is to ensure conventional levels of quality in both academic and non-academic programs. Accreditation status, whether at the university level or for specific programs, benefits students by ensuring the mobility of their credit as well as showing employers that the applicant has satisfied the requirements of a rigorous postsecondary program. Additionally, accreditation standing helps in recruiting faculty and staff seeking positions in programs that attract students with high achievement goals. Approved programs demonstrate a commitment to professional development as well.