



## **Is OHU Accredited? The Ins and Outs of Accreditation**

In the USA, there are two types of accreditation: specialty and regional. Specialty accreditation applies to professional programs that lead to a license, such as medicine, dentistry, dental hygiene and law. Regional accreditation applies to the institution itself, not specific programs within those universities.

In dentistry and dental hygiene specialty accreditation is controlled by the American Dental Association through their Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). Dental hygienists are the only licensed health professional whose education is controlled by another professional, the dentist. Other health professions like nursing, speech pathology, audiology and physical therapy control their own education and their appropriate entry level to practice.

Dentistry does not view dental hygiene as an autonomous profession. They see dental hygiene as a supervised auxiliary. Under accreditation by CODA, entry level to practice must be held at an associates degree level, no matter what the curriculum content. The ADA encourages the ADHA to participate in the revision of the standards for accreditation by adding additional courses and clinical requirements. Thus, the associate level dental hygienist actually completes more credit hours than are needed for a bachelor's degree, but only receives an associate degree. That is CODA Accreditation. Dental Hygienists complete the equivalent of five years of college (two years of prerequisites and three years of dental hygiene squeezed into two years - 150 contact credit hours) all for an associate's degree! And these programs are "accredited."

The primary reason for regional accreditation is money. Regional accreditation allows for participation in the Federal Student Loan Program and the Pell Grant Program. Without regional accreditation, students have no access to federally funded student loans. Regional accreditation is also said to ensure the quality of education, but that accreditation process asks only if the goals set by the

school were met. No outcomes are measured that would equate to quality. This type of accreditation is restricted to brick and mortar institutions, with no strictly online educational institutions being eligible to even apply. Regional accreditation is a closed system by which the accredited schools accredit each other. If you are not like all the other schools - brick and mortar - you are not welcome in their cartel.

Congress recommended changes to accreditation, since today it is a closed system that locks out innovative educational approaches that show desirable outcomes, like learning, employability or student debt repayment. Regional accreditation doesn't have to account for learning outcomes, graduation rates, employment or debt repayment.

Degree completion programs for dental hygienists are not individually accredited. Most are simply part of a regionally accredited, brick and mortar institution and are therefore never evaluated for learning outcomes or graduation rates.

O'Hehir University (OHU) will remain a strictly online institution, accepting all credits from dental hygienists and offering a reasonably priced degree completion program. OHU is not pursuing regional accreditation, which requires the increased expense of buildings, libraries, parking lots, etc. OHU will continue to work with graduates as they apply to master's degree programs to challenge the accreditation requirement by showing that the OHU Bachelor of Science Degree in Oral Health Promotion is equivalent to degrees earned through brick and mortar schools and their online programs.

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