

Council for Higher Education Accreditation

The Value of the Degree

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) endorses and advocates the role of the associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees. The higher education degree, from its origins more than 700 years ago to the present day, has been associated with enhancement of learning, transfer of knowledge across the generations and human betterment. The degree also enjoys an historic relationship to quality assurance in higher education, and represents basic aspirations of the higher education enterprise. The degree is thus valued by students, colleges, universities, and society at large.

Why is the Degree Important?

Education for the degree is education for

- developing and deepening the capacity to think;
- obtaining knowledge on which preparation for the future depends;
- acquiring a fuller understanding of cultures;
- strengthening the foundation for informed citizenship, participation in community life and public leadership; and,
- sustaining vocational roles and career goals.

The degree represents the efforts of educators and students to organize the learning experience in pursuit of these critical purposes. As the capstone of higher education, the degree is intended to foster lifelong learning and useful involvement in the world around us. By its confirmation of skill development, the degree signifies that the student has acquired some mastery of general education and preparation for career or profession. The degree indicates that a course of study has been completed and that the student is positioned to continue to learn, work, and function productively in pertinent communities.

What is the Distinction Between the Degree and Other Credentials?

Other kinds of credentials can, in their own particular contexts, be worthy and valuable. The degree is distinguishable by its requirement, in general, that a greater number of credits, representing a broader scope of study, be accumulated; by its general education expectations; and by its emphasis on the life of the mind. While some of the benefits of the degree can be obtained by other forms of credentialing, the degree uniquely represents the capacities and skills identified above.