



Frequently Asked Questions for Institutions

(Updated 12/1/2022)

- [What is the licensing role of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education?](#)
- [What is the difference between licensure and accreditation?](#)
- [What type of postsecondary institutions must have a license to operate in South Carolina?](#)
- [What types of postsecondary institutions are exempt from licensure?](#)
- [Does the Commission require licensing of educational entities offering postsecondary distance education \(online learning\)?](#)
- [What does “physical presence” in South Carolina mean?](#)
- [How does a school become licensed to operate or solicit in South Carolina?](#)
- [How long does the application review process take?](#)
- [What is the duration of approval?](#)
- [What are the fees associated with the Licensing process?](#)
- [What is the student complaint process?](#)
- [What is the process to close a licensed postsecondary institution?](#)
- [What operations are an institution prohibited to undertake before receiving a license in South Carolina?](#)
- [What if a postsecondary institution is operating without a license?](#)



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 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.

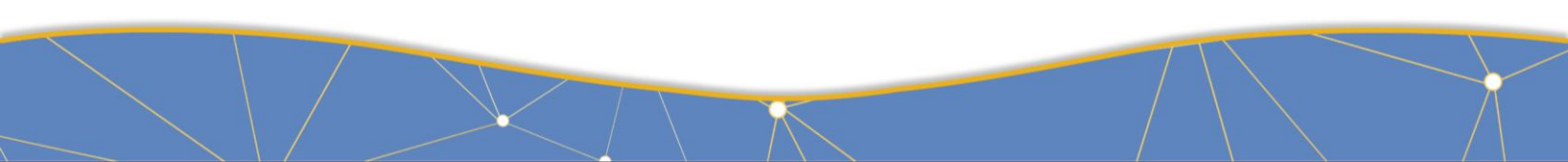
What type of postsecondary institutions must have a license to operate in South Carolina?

The Commission licenses any educational entity operating or soliciting in South Carolina offering resident or correspondence courses beyond the secondary school level to students upon the payment of tuition or fees. Additionally, the Commission issues permits to agents who represent out-of-state institutions or recruit on their behalf in the State.

What types of postsecondary institutions are exempt from licensure?

There are specific criteria for which an educational entity does not meet the definition of a "nonpublic educational institution" and are excluded from CHE licensure jurisdiction. The eligible exemptions are found in Section 59-58-30 South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, as amended. The Commission does not require that an exempt institution apply for an exemption, nor does it provide waivers.

If an educational entity believes they are exempt from licensure and would like to receive confirmation stating their exemption, they may request a letter from our office. The Commission reserves the right to examine the status of any exempt institution based on



information available in the future to the Commission or based on changes in authority the General Assembly grants to the Commission.

Does the Commission require licensing of educational entities offering postsecondary distance education (online learning)?

The Commission does not require licensing of institutions that enroll residents of South Carolina into online or distance education programs unless the institution operates or solicits in South Carolina in such a way that creates a physical presence. The participation of an institution in SARA does not supplant the requirement for licensure to operate or solicit in SC.

What does “physical presence” in South Carolina mean?

Physical presence in South Carolina is defined by the terms “operating or soliciting”. “Operating or soliciting” refers to having actual presence within the State of South Carolina and includes an instructional or administrative site within South Carolina whether owned, leased, rented, or provided without charge; (b) instruction whether theory or clinical originating from South Carolina utilizing teachers, trainers, counselors, advisors, sponsors, or mentors; (c) an agent, recruiter, in-state liaison personnel, institution, or business that solicits for enrollment or credits or for the award of an educational or occupational credential; and (d) advertising, promotional material, or public solicitation in any form that targets South Carolina residents through distribution or advertising in the state.

How does a school become licensed to operate or solicit in South Carolina?

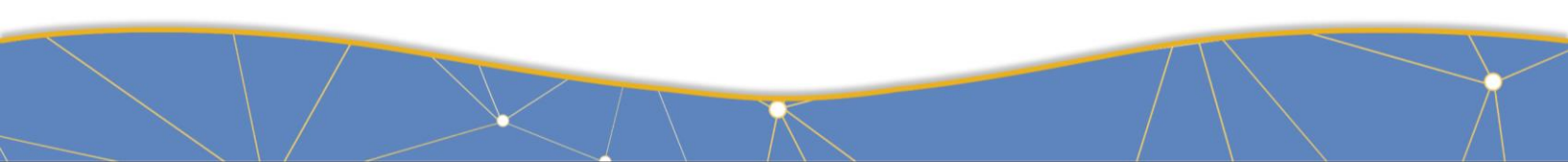
A postsecondary institution seeking a license to operate or solicit in South Carolina must first contact Licensing staff to determine if licensure is required. Once it has been determined that licensure is required, the institution must complete and submit an Initial Application for Licensure, along with the required application fee. Please review the below procedures for full details.

[Procedures for Non-Degree Granting Institutions](#)

[Procedures for Degree Granting Institutions](#)

How long does the application review process take?

Depending upon the level of review for the initial application (nondegree or degree granting), number of programs seeking licensure, and completeness of submission, the processing time may be 3-6 months or longer. Please contact Licensing staff for additional information.



What is the duration of approval?

Licenses for nondegree granting institutions will normally be issued for twelve months, renewable annually from date of issue, or other date longer than twelve months set by the commission to stagger the renewal dates of all institutions. The Commission may issue licenses to nondegree granting institutions for less than twelve months as circumstances justify. Licenses and renewal of licenses for degree-granting institutions may be granted for periods not to exceed five years. Renewal is contingent upon filing appropriate applications for renewal with the Commission. The institution and its courses or programs, facilities, faculty, and all other operations must meet the requirements for an original license at the effective date of the renewal.

What are the fees associated with the Licensing process?

View Schedule of Fines and Fees [here](#).

All fees must be remitted at the time of application in the form of check or money order made payable to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education.

What is the student complaint process?

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. 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 is the process to close a licensed postsecondary institution?

A postsecondary institution licensed by the Commission must notify Licensing staff in writing at the time the decision is made to close, but at a minimum, seventy-two hours before such action. The institution must also complete the school closure requirements pursuant to SC Code of Regulations Governing Nonpublic Postsecondary Institutions, 62.20-D. If you are a licensed institution and you may be closing operations in South Carolina, please contact Licensing staff as soon as possible.



What operations are an institution prohibited to undertake before receiving a license in South Carolina?

A new school must be licensed to operate or solicit by the Commission prior to engaging in any activities related to postsecondary education, either online or at a physical site within South Carolina. Postsecondary institutions may not advertise, recruit students, hold classes, or accept any tuition or fees until they have received a license from the Commission or determined exempt from the Commission oversight.

What if a postsecondary institution is operating without a license?

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](#).

