

## **CHOOSING A SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Choosing a school is a very important decision that should be made with care. Beware of misleading advertising about an educational opportunity that sounds too good to be true. It most likely is not a legitimate degree. As consumers, students should thoroughly investigate the options available to them before making a decision. Students invest hard work, time and money in their education and expect that education to pay off in employment, career enhancement, and/or a career change. The information provided below can help with that decision-making process.

### **Finding a School**

The state of Kansas offers several ways to help locate a Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) approved school. Enclosed in this booklet is a listing of schools approved by KBOR. To help ensure schools selected will not disappoint you, consider the following:

- Call the human resource department of the businesses in the field you would like to enter. Ask what education/training and credentials they look for in prospective employees. Find out if openings in the field are plentiful and what schools best prepare their employees.
- Call the school and ask for its graduation rates. Also ask for the percentages of students who pass their licensing exams and/or get placed in jobs.
- Request the names and phone numbers of recent graduates. Ask them: Did you find the training useful? Did you find work? A school that cannot put you in touch with satisfied customers is one you may want to avoid.
- If the school is accredited (see explanation under Accreditation and KBOR Approval), write or call the accrediting agency and ask for the results of the school's latest review.
- Contact an employment or career counselor and ask about schools in the field that you want to pursue.
- Call KBOR's Director of Private Postsecondary Education at (785) 296-4917 and ask about the school's compliance history, any complaints that may have been filed by students, or the findings from recent visits to the school.

Students can also search the Kansas Board of Regents' website at <http://www.kansasregents.org/institutions/career/index.html> by school or program. Once you have identified potential schools, you will want to request school catalogs and/or access to that information on-line. This information will define the workings of the school and outline the courses of instruction offered. As you learn about the schools and their programs, ask yourself the following:

- Will the course of instruction qualify me for employment in my chosen field?
- Am I capable of and sufficiently interested in pursuing and completing the total program?
- Is this school the best source of training in the field and are there other public, private, or vocational options?
- Do I really need to complete this program to be employed in this field and are my prospects of getting a job improved if I complete the program?
- Is the cost of the course of instruction reasonable for the amount of training provided?
- Am I financially able to pay for the program?

It is also good to check with any agency in the state of Kansas where a license is required to verify that the education you are considering will meet their license requirements. If you want to be a certified teacher, call the Kansas Department of Education 785-296-8012; for nursing call the Kansas Board of Nursing 785-296-4929, etc.

### **Enrollment Agreement and School Representatives**

Some KBOR approved schools require students to sign an "enrollment agreement." This document is a binding, legal contract between the student and the school. These schools usually have representatives whose job is to enroll students into the schools' programs. Do not be in any hurry to sign an agreement. If you are not completely satisfied, delay making a decision. If the proposition is legitimate, it will be as good next week as it is today. Before you sign anything, ask yourself the following questions:

- If an enrollment agreement is executed in any location other than the school itself, does the school representative have a permit issued by KBOR?
- Is the representative able to give evidence supporting any claims made about job opportunities, placement rates, and salaries or wages to be earned?
- Is the representative giving you time to think about your options or is she/he pressuring you to sign quickly?
- Have you read the enrollment agreement carefully, including the fine print, asked questions about points not understood, and taken time to reflect on the obligations listed on the contract?
- Does the enrollment agreement clearly state the cost of the program, method of payment, provisions for cancellation, and the school's refund policy?
- Before signing, have you thoroughly investigated the school and its course of instruction?

### **Transfer of credit to another institution**

The transfer of credits is a decision made by the receiving school. No institution should tell an individual that their courses will transfer unless they can show a written agreement listing specific transfer courses. If an individual knows that he/she wants to attend another school, it is always wise to call the second school to ask if they take credits from the first school.

### **Diploma Mills (aka Degree Mills)**

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 provides the federal definition of a diploma mill:

*“(20) DIPLOMA MILL. – the term ‘diploma mill’ means an entity that –*

*“(A) (i) offers, for a fee, degrees, diplomas, or certificates, that may be used to represent to the general public that the individual possessing such a degree, diploma, or certificate has completed a program of postsecondary education or training; and*

*“(ii) requires such individual to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain such degree, diploma, or certificate; and*

*“(B) lacks accreditation by an accrediting agency or association that is recognized as an accrediting agency or association of institutions of higher education (as such term is defined in section 102) by –*

*“(i) the secretary pursuant to subpart 2 of part H of title IV; or*

*“(ii) a Federal agency, State government, or other organization or association that recognizes accrediting agencies or associations.”*

*The definition may be found on page 10 of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008- ([http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:h4137enr.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_bills&docid=f:h4137enr.txt.pdf))*

*The Act also requires that:*

*“The Secretary [of the Department of Education] shall maintain information and resources on the Department’s website to assist students, families, employers in understanding what a diploma mill is and how to identify and avoid diploma mills.” The Secretary is to continue to collaborate with the other federal agencies to “prevent, identify, and prosecute diploma mills; and broadly disseminate to the public information about diploma mills, and resources to identify diploma mills.” [Page 17]*

### **Additional Resource to Help You Choose**

**College.gov** was built by the U.S. Department of Education in collaboration with students as the go-to source for information and resources about planning, preparing and paying for postsecondary education.

### **Accreditation and KBOR Approved Schools**

Each state has laws governing educational institutions. Licensed schools are required to meet a set of standards and to provide accurate consumer information to prospective students. Private and out-of-state postsecondary educational institutions must meet strict requirements before being approved by the Kansas Board of Regents, with the exception of cosmetology and barbering, which are overseen by the Kansas Board of Cosmetology

and the Kansas Board of Barbering, respectively. The term “accreditation” is often misunderstood or incorrectly used synonymously with ‘KBOR Approved’. Most private postsecondary schools serving Kansas students, whether they are located within or outside the state, are required by state law to obtain KBOR’s approval prior to advertising or providing training.

Accreditation, by various nonprofit bodies, guarantees that the degree granted by an institution meets the accrediting body’s standards of quality and content. While all manner of rankings can be found for colleges and universities and technical schools, and of individual programs within these institutions, accreditation ensures that the same degrees from different institutions meet a common set of quality standards, and that courses taken at one will likely be accepted by another similarly accredited institution, should you need to transfer. This does not mean that they are all equal, but it means they are somewhat comparable.

In general, there are three kinds of accreditation that students should know about when selecting a college or school: regional accreditation, national accreditation, and specialized accreditation. Basically, national accreditation looks at particular kinds of institutions such as theological seminaries; regional accreditation looks at multipurpose institutions such as community colleges and universities; and specialized accreditation looks at particular programs such as teacher certification, nursing, engineering, medicine, and law.

In Kansas an accredited institution may not call itself accredited unless the accreditation agency is recognized by the United States Department of Education. Those accreditation agencies that are recognized by the United States Department of Education are listed on the United States Department of Education website [www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html)

Students can also determine if a school is accredited by a legitimate accrediting agency at a database of accredited academic institutions posted by the U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/> or go to <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>

To find out more about how accreditation works in the U.S., refer to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation at <http://www.chea.org/default.asp> CHEA also provides a database of accredited academic institutions.

### **Summary**

Choosing a school is an important decision; and becoming an informed and knowledgeable consumer will help you with the decision making process. The Kansas Board of Regents can also help you through this process. Our staff periodically visits the schools and can help answer questions you may have about the best possible fit for your educational needs. Please contact the Director of Private Postsecondary Education at (785) 296-4917 if you have questions.