

# **Info Sheet: Montana Early Care and Education Career Development**

**MSU Early Childhood Project**

**Bozeman, Montana**

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## **Higher Education Accreditation**

### **What is Higher Education Accreditation?**

Accredited colleges and universities must complete several rigorous steps to receive accreditation, including a self-study, peer review, and a site visit. Accredited schools are subject to additional monitoring and judgment by their accrediting body (see below for more information on accrediting organizations). Institutions that receive accreditation must uphold high standards of educational quality.

### **Who Accredits Colleges and Universities?**

There are a wide variety of accrediting organizations in the United States. Those which are recognized for Early Care and Education Career Development purposes and by the U.S. Department of Education are regionally accredited by one of the following:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges
- Higher Learning Commission

For more information on any of these agencies, please visit [www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred](http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred).

### **How Can I Tell if My Institution is Regionally Accredited?**

Please verify that your college or university is regionally accredited by one of the above accrediting bodies BEFORE you enroll! To do so, visit your institution's website or call their registrar's office. Be sure to ask if they are REGIONALLY accredited and by WHOM. You may also visit the Department of Education's accreditation database at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>. This database lists each of the regionally accredited schools in the United States—approximately 6,900 in all! A quick check of your institution's accreditation status before you enroll can ultimately save you time and money by ensuring that you are working with a reputable institution.

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## **Why is it Important to take Credits from an Accredited Institution?**

Credits and degrees that are earned through non-regionally accredited institutions will NOT be recognized for Early Care and Education Career Development purposes in the State of Montana. Additionally, many regionally accredited colleges and universities (and some employers) will not recognize coursework completed at these institutions.

## **How Does Accreditation Work with Online and/or Distance Learning?**

If you are considering taking online courses or distance learning, be sure that the institution you are enrolling in is regionally accredited by one of the six agencies listed above. Many online and distance learning programs provide excellent training opportunities and those that are taken through a regionally accredited college or university and are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education may be used for Early Care and Education Career Development purposes in the state of Montana (Credits are eligible for consideration to satisfy the 20 semester credits required for Levels 4-8 on the Career Path).

**Watch Out!** Many online institutions will advertise that they are accredited and can offer you a college degree in a short amount of time. It is important that you ask WHO they are accredited by and make sure it is one of the six agencies listed above. The Early Childhood Project and most regionally accredited schools will NOT accept credits or degrees awarded by institutions accredited by the Distance Education Training Council (DETC).

*Sources:*

*U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov),  
[www.degreeinfo.com](http://www.degreeinfo.com)*

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