

# The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE): What You Need To Know

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# Funeral Service Education Today

- There are 57 ABFSE accredited programs in 31 states and the District of Columbia, with two in candidacy (up 60% since 1979)
- 44 of these are public institutions, 13 are private
- 7 are four-year programs; the rest are two-year
- 60% of these programs offer some type of distance education

# Just What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is the process by which an institution of postsecondary education evaluates its educational activities, in whole or part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it substantially achieves its objectives and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions or specialized units. (Young, 1983)

# Essential Values of Accreditation

- Stimulates continuous self-improvement in the profession
- Promotes flexibility and relevance
- Encourages peer review and collaboration
- Recognizes “community” responsibility
- Serves the public interest
- Accreditation is granted to Funeral Service institutions and programs by ABFSE

# Functions of Accreditation US Department of Education (USDE) and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

- ❖ Protection of students
- ❖ Protection of the public
- ❖ Protection of institutions/programs
- ❖ Protection of the field/discipline
- ❖ IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

# Two Types of Accreditation

- ❑ 1. Institutional

- ❑ 2. Specialized/Programmatic

# 1. Institutional

- Applies to an entire institution, indicating that each of the institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily of the same level of quality (USDE, 1999).
- Performed by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), and by 8 regional accrediting agencies.

## 2. Specialized/Programmatic

- Applies to programs, departments, or schools that are parts of an institution (from a college or school within a university to a curriculum within a discipline).
- Certain accrediting agencies (e.g. ABFSE) accredit professional schools as well as specialized institutions of higher education that are freestanding in their operations. Therefore, ABFSE is both an institutional and a specialized/programmatic accrediting agency, and the only specialized accreditor of funeral service education programs is the ABFSE COA.
- Institutions or organizations that are not accredited by ABFSE cannot award actual college credit or issue legitimate degrees and will not make the candidate taking their courses eligible for licensure.

# Six Basic Steps to Accreditation

1. Collaborative establishment of minimum standards and criteria.
2. Self-study and evaluation to measure performance against established standards.
3. On-site evaluation by expert representatives of the agency including professional educator, funeral service education faculty member, practitioner (practicing funeral director).
4. Publication by the agency of an official list of programs that meet its established standards.

# Six Basic Steps, continued

5. Monitoring of each accredited program throughout the period of accreditation to verify that it continues to meet established standards.
6. Periodic re-evaluation to ascertain whether continuation of the accreditation status initially granted to the program is warranted.

# Functions of ABFSE

- ✓ To further education in the field of funeral service and in allied fields.
- ✓ To formulate a standardized curriculum for all ABFSE accredited programs.
- ✓ To oversee and coordinate functions of the Committee on Accreditation of the ABFSE.
- ✓ ABFSE committees include: Curriculum, Bylaws, Scholarship, Finance, College/University Council, National Board Examination Liaison Committee.

# The Committee on Accreditation

The COA is autonomous and has the following functions:

- ❖ Grants candidacy and accreditation to qualified programs and/or institutions.
- ❖ Formulates standards for funeral service education.
- ❖ Provides organizational structure.
- ❖ Represents interests of practitioners.

- ❖ Administers ABFSE accredited programs, including scholarship program.
- ❖ The committee includes two public members from higher education outside of the funeral service field, as well as representatives from practitioner associations NFDA (National Funeral Directors Association), NFDMA (National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association), and ICCFA (International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association).

To be eligible for the National Board Examination and be licensed in most states, students must graduate from a funeral service education program that is accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education.

The program may also be regionally accredited if it is part of a larger institution offering other degrees.

# The Changing Face of Funeral Service Education

- 2010 – approximately 2,800 new enrollees and 4,000 continuing students, total students = 6,800
- Male students have decreased from 95% in 1971 to 48% currently
  - Female students have increased from 5% in 1971 to 52% currently

- 53% of students are age 26 or over (45% - 2007)
- 33% are over age 30
- Caucasian student enrollment has gone from 90% in 1971 to 66%
- African American enrollment has gone from 12% in 1971 to 23%
- Hispanic and Asian enrollment has gone from 2% in 1971 to 8%
- 62% have previous college experience. 13% have bachelor's or graduate degrees
- 10% of graduates are receiving bachelor's degrees
- 6.4% are receiving non-degree diplomas

# Outcomes Assessment

There is increased pressure on programs from the USDE and CHEA, and the entire profession to prove they are graduating students who will be competent, successful professionals.

Outcome assessment is setting measurable goals and holding programs accountable for the results.

Results include: graduation and employment rates, employer satisfaction surveys and National Board Exam pass rates.

# National Board Exam

Prior to 2004, 85 – 90% of graduates had completed the exam.

The exam is now required, and ABFSE works closely with The International Conference of Funeral Examining Boards to recalibrate the exam as the curriculum changes.

78% of candidates pass the exam on the first attempt.

# The Future of Funeral Service Education: How Can You Contribute?

- Respond to an ABFSE Standards Survey. The USDE and CHEA both require periodic review including comments and suggestions on accreditation standards and policy.
- Apply to become a practitioner (funeral director) member of the COA and of on-site evaluation teams.
- Assist the profession by encouraging qualified men and women to attend accredited programs.
- Volunteer to serve as a clinical site for a nearby program.

# Final Thoughts

- The future of Funeral Service Education looks very bright, and I'm very excited to be working with ABFSE and each one of you to ensure this bright future.
- Thank you for attending, and please feel free to contact me with any further questions.
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