

900 Religiously Affiliated and Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education in the USA

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Most people are amazed, but a non-duplicative count of *at least* 900 self-described religiously affiliated campuses reporting to the *2005 Higher Education Directory* and to the U.S. Department of Education shows a strong faith tradition in American higher education. Out of some 1700 “independent” non-profit campuses in the USA, these 900 accredited institutions add to the rich diversity of this independent sector. It is difficult to generalize too much about these institutions, but input from dozens of experts who know them allow for several observations...

1. **Accreditation**. Seven regional and other institutional accrediting agencies recognized by the Secretary of Education review their quality of education based on the same U.S. Department of Education regulations that apply to non-religious institutions.
2. **Ownership**. Many are fully owned by a religious denomination, order or other ecclesiastical body. Other campuses have amended their legal relationships with their parent religious bodies over the years. And still other intentionally faith-based colleges were always independent of any external religious entity.
3. **Diversity of Type**. Within the Catholic tradition there are several sub-groups which have sponsored and supported particular campuses reflecting a specific tradition. Within the Protestant tradition, there are easily 40 denominations which sponsor one or more campuses (see chart following). Jewish campuses might identify most with one or another tradition. Some religious campuses have written agreements with more than one denomination or tradition. And a good number of intentionally Christian colleges are independent of any particular religious entity.
4. **Governing Boards**. These institutions have governing boards that range from those whose members are fully appointed by their parent religious body to those whose boards are self-perpetuating with no outside influence. Many have agreements that X percent of trustees will be selected from their affiliated faith communities.
5. **Size and Scope**. Some in this diverse group of institutions are 200+ years old; a few were formed within the past 10-20 years. Enrollment ranges from a few hundred to more than 30,000. Virtually all are four-year (a few two-year campuses but not many), with perhaps a majority offering masters programs and a small percent the doctoral degree. Some have seminaries. Alumni of these campuses approximate 10-15 million and the membership of the 40-plus supporting religious entities would exceed 150 million people.
6. **Financial and Other Support**. Some of these 900 institutions receive a significant portion of their operating budgets from their religious bodies; others receive virtually none. Individual churches, synagogues or mosques may or may not put a priority on giving money or referring students to their affiliated campuses.

7. **Student Religious Diversity.** Most campuses have student bodies of great religious diversity, perhaps including students from 30-40 different religious affiliations (or no religious affiliation). Very few campuses limit their enrollment to students who profess a certain faith, but some do.
8. **Faculty Religious Qualifications.** Most campuses have faculties that reflect a range of religious affiliations (or no religious affiliation). Federal policy has continued to respect the autonomy of all institutions on the central questions of “who shall teach” and “what shall be taught” (Justice Felix Frankfurter’s principles in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 1957). These two general guidelines are particularly important for faith-related institutions in fulfilling their distinctive missions.
9. **Quality.** Like other independent colleges, religiously affiliated colleges have rates higher than the average of all postsecondary institutions in terms of degree completion, graduates going on to graduate school, loan repayments, etc. They would argue that they are “value added” institutions by providing the same degree programs as non-sectarian campuses, but also focus on character development, leadership and spiritual formation.
10. **Unique Distinctives.** As well as their religious heritage and various religious majors, several of these campuses focus primarily on one type of student, e.g., women or African Americans. Many have requirements for study abroad or service to the community.
11. **Economic Impact.** These 900 religiously affiliated campuses enroll more than two million students, employ upwards of 600,000 faculty and staff and have operating budgets of more than \$35 billion. They are located in almost every state.
12. **Federal Assistance.** Essentially all of these campuses participate in federal student aid programs, as the federal government’s interest is in allowing students to make the best choice according to their academic, social and other interests. Several hundred religious colleges have shied away from applying for other types of government aid for fear of future “strings” or conditions that might jeopardize their missions.
13. **Multi-Campus Collaboration by a Religious Group.** Many of the religious groups noted in the chart provide staff to facilitate collaboration among the related campuses, for example professional development, marketing and church-relations.
14. **Other Affiliations.** Most of these 900 campuses also are active in one or more of these organizations which include both religious and secular members: American Council on Education (ACE); National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU); Council of Independent Colleges (CIC).

In sum, these approximately 900 institutions contribute to the richness of postsecondary education found in the United States compared to the much more government-owned systems in most countries. Governments at all levels have found ways to protect tax-payer funds from being used for proselytizing or worship activities, yet support the public purpose of higher education so important to our nation. Students must have the right to freely choose one of these religiously affiliated institutions so long as they continue to meet the same academic standards and fiscal accountability requirements as other public and independent accredited institutions.

Approximate numbers of accredited institutions participating in federal student aid programs by their primary religious affiliation.**

Number	Best Attempt at Non-Duplicative Numbers by Primary Affiliation (as of 4/1/05)
220	Roman Catholic (in Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities)
108	United Methodist (confirmed)
65	Presbyterian (USA) (confirmed)
56	Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools (confirmed)
55	Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (confirmed)
36	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (confirmed, including 8 self-standing seminaries)
21	Churches of Christ (confirmed)
19	Episcopal Church (confirmed)
17	Christian Church/Disciples of Christ (confirmed)
16	American Baptist (confirmed)
16	Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (confirmed by ABHE)
14	Assemblies of God (confirmed)
14	Friends (confirmed)
14	Seventh Day Adventist Church (confirmed)
12	Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (confirmed)
11	Mennonite Denominations (confirmed)
10	Church of the Nazarene (confirmed)
8	Church of God
5	African American Episcopal
5	Reformed Church in America (confirmed)
5	Free Methodist Church (confirmed)
5	Wesleyan Church
96	Est. from 20+ other denominations/org. with 4 or fewer accredited campuses
828	Sub-Total
Estimates of Non-Denominational Religious Campuses NOT Included Above	
26	In the Association for Biblical Higher Education (total 83;confirmed)
20	In the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (total 129;confirmed)
26	In the Association of Theological Schools (total 150; confirmed)
72	Sub-Total
900	Best Estimate of Separate, Accredited Self-Described Religious Institutions at Which Students Receive Federal Student Aid Benefits

** This chart and the narrative summary was originally assembled by Dr. Bob Andringa, president emeritus of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities with the help of colleagues in the Executives in Church-Related Higher Education group. A listing of 722 institutions by religious affiliation can be found in the *2005 Higher Education Directory* by Higher Education Publications, Inc., Falls Church, VA.