



The regulation of higher education takes different forms around the world. Most countries have a governmental ministry of education that controls higher education. In the United States, however, our system of government encourages a sharing of responsibility rather than centralized control. We take a three-pronged approach in which the federal government, state governments and accreditation organizations share responsibility. This approach has allowed the United States to develop one of the most diverse and well-respected systems of higher education in the world.

The Role of the Triad in Higher Education

While each of the three entities in the triad operates independently, each has a role in ensuring the quality of higher education. This independence is defined and protected by laws that establish certain relationships among the elements of the triad. These relationships are guided by cooperation, mutual respect and trust to ensure maximum effectiveness.

Our system of higher education flourishes because of its rich diversity and continuing autonomy.

- Accreditation ensures that programs and institutions of higher education meet acceptable levels of quality in teaching and learning and also promotes continuous improvement in those areas.
- State governments issue licenses to institutions that operate in the state. They also promote cooperation and collaboration among state institutions of higher education. How much control they exert over higher education differs from state to state. For some, it is as simple as requiring state registration while others have multiple agencies that play a role in oversight.
- The federal government focuses on the administrative and fiscal integrity of its student financial aid programs. With federal investment in higher education on the rise, there is increased concern about the effectiveness of federal oversight of these programs.

The Philosophy of the Triad

From the founding of our nation, there has been concern about overreaching by the federal government. The tenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted to prevent this. It guarantees that any rights and responsibilities not specifically assigned to the federal government belong to the states and the people. More than just words on paper, this amendment has resulted in a higher education system that is rich in diversity. It allows institutions and programs of higher learning to operate autonomously, each pursuing a mission specific to its unique communities of interest.

For more information on ASPA and our member organizations, contact us at 773-857-7900 or aspa@aspa-usa.org.