

The Value of ABET Accreditation to Industrial Hygiene Programs



INTRODUCTION

Institutional accreditation by regional or national accreditation organizations has become an integral part of quality assurance of higher education in the United States and globally. However, institutional accreditation does not look specifically at the quality of each individual degree program. Program-level, or “specialized,” accreditation is needed to ensure that degree programs meet established standards — those set by accrediting bodies through practicing professionals. These standards are based upon disciplinary guidelines in areas such as curriculum, faculty expertise, student admission and graduation requirements, available facilities and financial resources. Program-level accreditation focuses on the quality of both the degree program and the characteristics of its graduates.

ABOUT ABET

ABET is a highly respected, nonprofit, non-governmental agency that accredits programs in applied and natural science, which includes industrial hygiene programs, computing, engineering and engineering technology, within the United States and globally. ABET accreditation is voluntary, and an increasing number of institutions seek accreditation for their programs each year, underscoring that the professional education community finds real value in accreditation. These programs experience a rigorous peer-review process that verifies their graduates have the knowledge, skills and abilities to successfully enter their respective profession. Moreover, graduates of ABET-accredited programs gain global recognition due to ABET’s increasing international stature as an accreditor of STEM programs and through its partnership with other accreditors of STEM programs around the world. Sought worldwide, ABET’s processes are highly regarded for their responsiveness to industry, focus on learning outcomes and non-prescriptive criteria, which encourage



innovation. ABET is also one of the few accreditors that has achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification — demonstrating its own commitment to continuous improvement.

Currently, ABET accredits 4,144 programs at 812 colleges and universities in 32 countries (updated each October). Over 100,000 students graduate from ABET-accredited programs each year, and millions of graduates have received degrees from ABET-accredited programs since 1932.

ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS FOR INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE, HEALTH PHYSICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAMS

Accreditation is about continuous improvement, focusing on what students learn and experience. The Academic Accreditation Committee of the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) determines specific topics programs in Industrial Hygiene (IH) must ensure their students learn. IH academic professionals and practitioners review the programs and apply the IH criteria topics. For environmental health and safety, AIHA partners with the American Society of Safety Professionals, and for Health Physics programs, AIHA partners with the Health Physics Society.

BENEFITS OF PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION

There are several benefits to having students graduate from an accredited program, including:

- **Employability and international mobility:** Graduates will have wider access to global employment opportunities as many multinational companies require graduation from an accredited program, and their qualifications are recognized internationally. Graduates of Industrial Hygiene programs receive partial credit for the four years of experience requirement when applying for a Certificate of Industrial Hygiene (CIH).
- **Military requirements:** The United States Armed Forces also require students they send to universities for degrees in Industrial Hygiene to apply to ABET-accredited programs. The U.S. Navy states that in hiring industrial hygienists, they prefer those graduating from ABET-accredited programs.
- **Confidence:** Assurance that the program contains a core curriculum covering specific fundamental and advanced topics, that the faculty are suitably qualified and current in their discipline and that the program has appropriate institutional support to deliver the program of study, including modern tools, equipment and facilities. Central to this confidence is that the program has been recognized via peer evaluation through the accreditation process.
- **Transparency:** Ensures that the institution makes public the program educational objectives and student outcomes.
- **Faculty benefits:** Faculty teaching in an ABET-accredited program find value through the use of a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process to ensure a high-quality program and a commitment to best practices, as well as support for professional development and a focus on “student learning outcomes” rather than “teaching points.”
- **Employer benefits:** Employers value accreditation as it provides assurance that graduates have the knowledge, skills and experiences required to be successful upon entering the workforce. They also provide feedback as a stakeholder in the CQI process. The industrial advisory group provides specific feedback to the program’s faculty and administrators, thereby ensuring students are exposed to the knowledge and skillsets that industry needs.
- **Institutional benefits:** Institutions find value as accreditation is a tool that may be used to attract new students, faculty and industry support. The National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) encourages Industrial Hygiene programs applying for NIOSH grants to obtain ABET accreditation. Internationally, some governments that provide the resources for their students studying abroad require the students to choose programs that have received both institutional and programmatic accreditation. ABET for Industrial Hygiene program accreditation is a well-known choice.

CONCLUSION

As in all technical professions, industrial hygienists must stay current with the latest technology, and the same is true for accredited programs. To ensure these programs meet current industry expectations for educating STEM professionals, AIHA representatives examine and update program criteria on a regular basis. Criteria are flexible and non-prescriptive, enabling programs to innovate and to keep pace with technological advancements.

Accreditation provides real value to its stakeholders and institutions. It helps maintain standards and ensures a thorough and credible self-assessment of the program on a regular basis and helps provide a means of accountability to a wide range of constituents. In an age where many question the value of higher education, the accreditation process provides needed confidence that programs are preparing students to be successful.



@ABETaccredit



@abetaccredit



@ABETaccredit



@abetaccredit