

Section A: Introduction

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History and Purpose of MEAC

The Midwifery Education Accreditation Council (MEAC) was formed in 1991 by the National Coalition of Midwifery Educators as a not-for-profit organization. MEAC's standards for accreditation were developed by expert midwifery educators from a variety of midwifery educational programs in the United States. MEAC is a membership organization comprised of institutions and programs accredited by MEAC.

The purpose of MEAC is to establish standards for the education of competent midwives and to provide a process for self-evaluation and peer evaluation for diverse educational programs. The U.S. Secretary of Education recognizes MEAC as a national accrediting agency for direct-entry midwifery education programs and institutions.

Mission

MEAC's mission is to promote excellent education in midwifery through accreditation. Its standards and criteria for the education of midwives incorporate the nationally recognized core competencies and guiding principles of the Midwives Alliance of North America and the requirements for national certification by North American Registry of Midwives.

MEAC's accreditation criteria for midwifery education programs reflect the unique components and philosophy of the Midwives Model of Care™.

What is the Midwives Model of Care™?

The Midwives Model of Care™ is based on the fact that pregnancy and birth are normal life events. It includes: monitoring the physical, psychological and social well-being of the mother throughout the childbearing cycle; providing the mother individualized education, counseling and prenatal care, continuous hands-on assistance during labor and delivery, and postpartum support, minimizing technological interventions; and identifying and referring women who require obstetrical attention. The application of this woman-centered model has proven to reduce the incidence of birth injury, trauma, and cesarean section.

Midwives are committed to improving women's health care and pregnancy outcomes, promoting sound nutrition and breastfeeding, and providing respectful, competent care. The efficacy of midwifery has been well documented. In the five European countries that have the lowest infant mortality rates, midwives attend more than 70 percent of all births. Since 1954, the United States' infant mortality rate has hovered between 17th and 24th in the world. Increasing access to midwives could contribute to the improvement of these statistics. Midwifery education should be accountable to national standards to ensure that midwives are well prepared for the important work they do.

MEAC'S Philosophy on Midwifery Education

Adopted January 2013

As an accrediting body for direct-entry midwifery educational programs, the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council plays an essential role in the development and support of the profession by requiring educators to follow a path of continual growth and improvement in the delivery of midwifery education. This is achieved by supporting the development and accountability of high-quality educational programs built on evidence-based and current best-practice research. MEAC views accountability as a necessary and positive component of professional midwifery, and we embrace our role as accreditors in this process.

MEAC sets standards for midwifery education while encouraging heterogeneity in the educational models used and the individuals served. The tension between upholding objective standards and maintaining a rich variety of options for students is a challenge we gratefully accept.

We uphold the principles of inclusivity, non-discrimination, and diversity with regard to gender identity, race, marital status, ethnic origin, creed, age, sexual orientation, or disability in our board composition and in our support of varied educational models. MEAC standards for accreditation encourage broad student and faculty recruitment among our member schools.

MEAC values competency-based educational programs that train midwives to serve culturally, socially, and economically diverse women and families inclusive of gender identity, race, marital status, ethnic origin, creed, age, sexual orientation, and disability. We believe the following to be integral to that goal:

- Mastery of core competencies is not defined by the length of time spent in the educational process but should meet an international standard of midwifery education.
- Mastery of core competencies can be accomplished through various educational routes including conventional classroom format, distance learning, and clinical placement.

We believe in the Midwives Model of Care, not only as the form of care provided by midwives to their clients but also as a standard for our work of accreditation. This value leads us to strive toward respectful, fair, individualized, responsive and transparent interactions among those with whom we work.

We aspire to be a source of positive influence in healthcare by collaborating with midwifery and other professional organizations. We believe in the midwifery educator's ability to effect change in the maternity care system by making the Midwives Model of Care more accessible to all women through the training of skilled midwives and their integration as primary providers in women's health.

What is Accreditation?

The practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs in order to ensure a basic level of quality. Private educational associations, such as MEAC, adopt criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and develop procedures for evaluating institutions and programs to determine whether they are operating at basic levels of quality.

Each institution or program accredited by MEAC:

1. Utilizes competent, qualified faculty.
2. Bases its course of education on nationally recognized standards.
3. Admits qualified students based on established criteria.
4. Demonstrates students' success and satisfaction, producing graduates prepared for licensure and/or national certification by North American Registry of Midwives and employment in the field of midwifery.
5. Advertises its course of study truthfully.
6. Practices sound financial management.

To become accredited, each program or institution must:

1. Make a self-evaluation study of its program based on MEAC standards.
2. Submit this study for review by an outside committee of peers and experts in midwifery education.
3. Open its doors to a thorough inspection.
4. Repeat the process every three to five years.

The applicant program or institution voluntarily elects to apply for accreditation and it voluntarily agrees to comply with all MEAC standards. The burden of proof in demonstrating compliance with standards rests with the institution or program, not with MEAC. The institution must prove to MEAC that it meets or exceeds the standards. MEAC considers information about an applicant institution from any source in reaching its conclusions.

What Types of Programs Are Eligible?

The Midwifery Education Accreditation Council (MEAC) welcomes all midwifery education programs in the United States to participate in the process of accreditation.

Its scope of accrediting includes comprehensive midwifery preparation through various routes of education including:

- Free standing schools or colleges of midwifery offering certificate and degree programs
- Certificate and degree programs of midwifery within other public and private accredited institutions
- Free standing schools or institutions that offer distance courses and/or structured apprenticeships as part of the midwifery curriculum, leading to a certificate or degree in midwifery

Institutions and programs accredited by MEAC provide the student with the academic and clinical requirements to qualify for the North American Registry of Midwives national examination leading to certification as a Certified Professional Midwife (CPM).

Distance or Correspondence Education

Institutions/programs that offer any instruction via distance education or correspondence education must provide evidence that they are in compliance with MEAC Standards by meeting the same benchmarks that apply to all institutions/programs. See the definition for distance education and correspondence education in the Glossary.

Pre-accreditation vs. Accreditation

To apply for accreditation, institutions or programs must have graduated at least four students—the majority of whom is licensed or certified midwives or is working in midwifery or a related field. Institutions or programs who do not meet these criteria may apply for pre-accreditation, but must otherwise meet the same standards as those set for institutions or programs seeking accreditation.

Throughout this Handbook, the use of the word “accreditation” also applies to “pre-accreditation” unless otherwise specified.

Benefits of Accreditation for Midwifery Schools

MEAC accreditation—

1. Is an advocacy process that helps midwifery programs evaluate themselves according to their own goals.
2. Provides technical assistance to the applicant schools to achieve a high quality program that meets MEAC standards.
3. Offers a process that can be used as a guide by institutions in evaluating their present program and enhancing the quality of education and training provided.
4. Verifies that an institution or program meets established standards.
5. Determines that a midwifery education program has set objectives for students who enroll, has provided services that enable these students to meet those objectives, and can in fact show that students have benefited from the learning experiences provided.
6. Assists prospective students in identifying acceptable programs or institutions.
7. Assists institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits.
8. Offers a unique professional development opportunity for school staff and faculty to evaluate their own institutions or programs.
9. Protects an institution or program against harmful internal and external pressure.
10. Helps to identify institutions and programs for the investment of public and private funds.
11. Provides a reliable indicator of educational quality to employers, counselors, educators, government officials, and the public.
12. Establishes one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for Federal student financial aid programs.
13. Provides communication to institutions about issues, changes, and updates within the midwifery community that affect accreditation standards and procedures.

Members of the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council

Institutions and programs accredited and pre-accredited by MEAC are MEAC members and they elect the Board of Directors. Board members are the decision-makers regarding accreditation and pre-accreditation for applicant schools. They include professional midwives, midwifery educators, midwifery program administrators, consumers of midwifery education, consumers of midwifery care and members of the public.

Member Schools

Visit the MEAC website at www.meacschools.org for a current list of MEAC member schools and their contact information.

Board of Directors

Visit the MEAC website at www.meacschools.org for a current list of MEAC Board of Directors and their biographies.

MEAC Staff

Visit the MEAC website at www.meacschools.org for a current list of MEAC staff and their biographies.

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