Institutional Authorization

In addition to filing appropriate paperwork to form a nonprofit corporation in Ohio, private colleges are also required to receive state and Federal authorization as an institution of higher education.

**Ohio Institutional Authorization**

No nonprofit college or university in Ohio may confer “degrees, diplomas, or other written evidences of proficiency or achievement” unless it has received a certificate of authorization issued by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). An institution may not call itself a college or university without this certification. The certificate is a consumer-protection measure designed to ensure that an institution has the appropriate academic and fiscal resources needed to educate students. A copy of this certificate should also be filed with the Ohio Secretary of State if the institution is incorporated.

This certificate of authorization must specify the following:

- The diplomas or degrees the institution is authorized to give;
- The courses the institution is authorized to offer; and
- The sites at which courses are to be conducted.

The exact authorization process for institutions is outlined in Ohio Administrative Code. But statute gives DHE the authority to do the following:

- **Determine criteria** to be evaluated in the authorization process;
- **Proscribe the forms** by which this information is to be conveyed to ODHE;
- **Charge fees** to cover the cost of this process;
- **Review applications** for authorization and reauthorization within 22 weeks of receipt; and
- **Revoke certificates** of authorization.

When evaluating an application for authorization or reauthorization, ODHE must evaluate the following:

- Purpose of the institution – is there a clear mission?
- Academic control – are there controls in place to ensure a high level of academic performance of faculty and students?
Institutional Authorization

- Curriculum – does the curriculum cover the essential elements of that discipline and lead towards a set goal?
- Faculty – is the faculty qualified for the level of instruction being undertaken?
- Supporting services – are these adequate to create a suitable learning environment for students?
- General operations – are these conducted with high ethical standards?
- Visitation – each institution seeking authorization shall be visited by an Ohio Department of Higher Education team to verify these standards.

Off-campus programs must also be authorized. The standards for off-campus programs are similar to the requirements for institutional authorization.

Once an institution receives authorization, it must file for an amended certificate if items listed on the original certificate of authorization have changed. This would include changes in degrees offered, or locations for offering courses or degrees. Once the amended certificate has been filed and approved by ODHE, it must also be filed with the Secretary of State.

A certificate of authorization is not indefinite in length. The length of time an institution is authorized to operate in Ohio is determined by ODHE based on the evaluation process. Generally, if an institution has a review with no concerns, it will be issued a ten-year certificate of authorization. To continue operations in Ohio, an institution must apply for reauthorization prior to the expiration of their certificate of authorization.

References:
Department of Higher Education Office of Institutional and Program Authorization and Reauthorization
Department of Higher Education Guidelines & Procedures for Academic Program Review

Ohio Revised Code and Ohio Administrative Code Sections
  ORC §1713.02 – Institutional Authorization Authority
  OAC 3333-1-08 – Institutional Authorization Procedure

Regional Institutional Authorization
In addition to institutional authorization by ODHE, an institution must also have or be seeking accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). HLC is one of six regional bodies that accredit public, independent, and some for-profit degree-granting institutions.

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Formed as a voluntary association for the peer review of other institutions, which continues to be its primary purpose, regional accrediting bodies have a relationship with the U.S. Department of Education. For the convenience of the federal government, they also serve as the primary standard for determining if an institution’s students are eligible for federal financial aid and for the institution’s eligibility for other federal grant programs. To gain HLC accreditation, an organization must meet five major criteria:

- Mission and Integrity
- Preparing for the Future
- Student Learning and Effective Teaching
- Discovery and Application of Knowledge
- Engagement and Service

Regional accreditation is not permanent and must be updated. To maintain HLC accreditation, an institution must submit annual data to HLC as well as select one of the organization’s models to maintain accreditation.

References:
Accreditation in the United States
Higher Learning Commission
Secretary’s Recognition of Accrediting Agencies