

IOWA UNIVERSITY STUDENT AID COMMISSION

Mount Mercy University Application for Voluntary Postsecondary Registration in Iowa July 22, 2016

STAFF ACTION:

Approve Mount Mercy University's voluntary application for postsecondary registration in Iowa for a two-year term that begins on July 22, 2016, and ends on July 22, 2018.

Registration Purpose

Mount Mercy University (Mount Mercy) lawfully operates a postsecondary, degree-granting institution in Iowa under an exemption from registration in Iowa Code §261B.11(1)(j): "Higher education institutions that meet the criteria established under §261.9(1)." The criteria referenced in Iowa Code §261.9(1), establish institutional eligibility for the Iowa Tuition Grant Program. Mount Mercy meets the Iowa Tuition Grant Program institutional eligibility criteria. Whether an institution actually awards funds from this state grant program is immaterial.

Thus, Mount Mercy is not required to seek the explicit approval of the State of Iowa in order to lawfully offer postsecondary degree programs in Iowa. For the purpose of the federal Department of Education's rules in 34 CFR §600.9 that require federal student aid participating schools to be authorized by an action of the State in which the school is located, Mount Mercy is listed in Iowa Administrative Code 281-Chapter 21, by name, as a private nonprofit, degree-granting postsecondary educational institution that lawfully operates in Iowa.

Institutional Information

Mount Mercy University is a private, non-profit postsecondary institution that provides instruction via face-to-face and distance education delivery modalities from its main campus located at 1330 Elmhurst Dr NE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402. Mount Mercy's President is Laurie Hamen, J.D. at the same address. The designated Iowa contact person for Mount Mercy is Scot Reisinger, at the same address. The Iowa Secretary of State records an active, domestic non-profit corporation registration # 61068 for Mount Mercy. The Iowa registered agent is Laurie Hamen, J.D. at the same address.

Physical facilities: The Mount Mercy campus is more than adequate for instruction students. The campus has residence halls, campus apartments, a recreation center, a library, a chapel, classrooms, and other university based buildings. A virtual tour is available online at:

✓ <https://www.mtmercy.edu/virtual-tour>.

Instructional Methodology: Online classes are asynchronous so students are not required to log in at a certain day or time but there are weekly deadlines that keep students engaged and on track with their course progress. Typical coursework includes interacting with fellow students and the instructor through discussion forums, submitting written assignments, project-based work (both group and individual), and online quizzes and exams. There are opportunities for live video chat, phone conferencing, and email assistance as requested by the individual student.

Accreditation: Mount Mercy University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, a regional accrediting agency recognized by the federal Department of Education. In addition, Mount Mercy has programmatic accreditation from the following entities, all of which are also recognized by the federal Department of Education, for specific programs Mount Mercy offers:

- The Council on Social Work Education
- The Iowa Board of Nursing
- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- Iowa Department of Education

Federal Stafford Loan Cohort Default Rate: 4.5%. For comparison purposes, the national average default rate of all schools for the same reporting period is 11.8%.

Graduation Rate: Mount Mercy reports a 65% graduation rates for students who complete a degree or other award such as a certificate within 150% of "normal time" for completing the program in which they are enrolled.

Average Loan Debt upon Graduation: Mount Mercy reports \$26,603 for average loan debt upon graduation of individuals completing the programs at the school in 2014-15.

Record Preservation: Mount Mercy's student information system records are backed up nightly. Those electronic backups are stored and maintained by the school's Information Technology Department. Backup to existing infrastructure occurs in the campus server room and is secured by lock and key. The data is also secured by job role so that only network administrators have access to the backup locations and files. To prevent identity theft, students' non-public personal information is maintained in locking fire-proof files, and available only to authorized personnel. Upon graduation, the student file is scanned and kept in electronic format, which is backed up nightly. Personal information from a student's paper file that is no longer needed is shredded.

Transcript Requests: Any current or former student wishing to obtain a transcript may do so by contacting:

- Mount Mercy Registrar's Office
1330 Elmhurst Dr NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
✓ registrar@mtmercy.edu.

Student Learning Resources: Mount Mercy University provides students with a variety of on-campus and online resources to aid in academic achievement and career and personal development.

- The Busse Library provides reference and research, including literature searches, citation verification and bibliography assistance.
<https://www.mtmercy.edu/busse-library>.
- Career Services teach students the skills to locate and secure professional employment opportunities or entrance into graduate or professional college

through career exploration, resume and cover letter help, mock interviews, employment opportunities, and special events.

<https://www.mtmercy.edu/career-services>.

- The Academic Center of Excellence helps under-prepared students prepare, prepared students advance, and advanced students excel through academic counseling, writing assistance, peer tutoring, accessibility services and study space.

<https://www.mtmercy.edu/academic-center-excellence>.

- At the Olson Marriage & Family Therapy Clinic graduate students provide free mental health and relationship counseling services to Mount Mercy students and low-cost services to Cedar Rapids community members.

<http://www.olsonmftclinic.com/>.

- The campus ministry offers Mass and sacraments, ecumenical worship and fellowship, and service learning and volunteer opportunities.

<https://www.mtmercy.edu/campus-ministry>.

Curriculum Evaluation and Development: Annual assessment of each program is firmly established at Mount Mercy. Faculty members review and assess selected student learning objectives each year, gathering and interpreting data concerning their graduates and determining appropriate follow-up action. Coordinators for the programs are charged with managing and reporting on this assessment process. Chairs fulfill this role for their own disciplines and collaborate with coordinators on behalf of other programs in the department. Coordinators are expected to work closely with their department chairs, sharing findings and reports with them and contributing to ongoing improvement activities. In addition, programs participate in assessment of the college-wide objectives (discussed above) and the core curriculum. Each program has established learning objectives for students graduating with a program in that discipline. At least two objectives are assessed each year, rotating through all learning objectives in a five year cycle. Assessment reports are read by the Academic Assessment committee and feedback is given yearly. Workshops focused on assessment are held each term for coordinators to discuss activities and findings.

Student Complaints Process: Mount Mercy provides student grievance procedures that cover various academic and program issues. Mount Mercy also provides a grievance procedure for general complaints. Mount Mercy provides information to outside agencies students may direct complaints to if the student is not satisfied with the administrative outcome of complaint. These procedures and contacts are located on the school's website.

- ✓ <https://www.mtmercy.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/admissions/StudentConsumerComplaintProcess.pdf>.

Programs Offered Under Registration

(Note: The programs listed below are only those for which Mount Mercy believes coverage under the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) may be necessary. However, Mount Mercy's registration authorization to operate at a location in

Iowa is at the institutional level; the Commission authorizes the institution to offer all of its programs in Iowa.)

In addition to campus based programs which may offer field experiences, Mount Mercy also offers online programs at a reduced tuition rate. The estimated total charge for tuition, fees, books, and supplies applicable to each online program is listed below.

- Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration – \$65,600.
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN) – \$32,800.
- Master of Arts in Criminal Justice - \$15,840.

Field Experiences:

Mount Mercy on ground campus complete capstone courses in undergraduate programs and other field experience which may occur locally or nationally. The online programs are offered to both local and out-of-state students.

Registration Compliance

As required by Iowa Code §261B.4, Mount Mercy disclosed its policy on refunding tuition charges for withdrawn students on its website.

- ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/online/financialaid/>.
- ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/financialaid/>.

Administrative rules specifically require the school to comply with the requirements of Chapter §261.9(1) “e” through “h” by implementing the following policies.

- Iowa Code §261.9(1)(e) requires a school to maintain and disseminate a drug and alcohol abuse policy that includes sanctions for violation of the school’s policy and information about the availability of drug or alcohol counseling or rehabilitation.
 - ✓ https://www.mtmercy.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/compliance/clery_report.pdf.
- Iowa Code §261.9(1)(f) requires a school to maintain and disseminate a sexual abuse policy that includes information about counseling opportunities and reporting instances of sexual abuse to school officials and law enforcement. Mount Mercy discloses these policies in its student handbook.
 - ✓ https://www.mtmercy.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/compliance/clery_report.pdf.
- Iowa Code §261.9(1)(g) requires a school to maintain a special policy concerning institutional charges for members of the Iowa National Guard or reserve members of the U.S. Armed Forces, or the spouse of such a member if the member has a dependent child, when the service member or spouse must withdraw from the school because the service member or spouse has been called to active (Iowa) state or federal military duty or service. Mount Mercy maintains a policy that is compliant with this requirement and will disclose the policy to students in its online Academic Catalog.
 - ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/academicpolicyinformation/#militaryvettext>.
- Iowa Code §261.9(1)(h) requires a school to develop and implement a policy for employees who, in the course of their employment, attend, examine, counsel, or treat a child and who suspect the physical or sexual abuse of that child. Mount Mercy disclosed a policy that is compliant with this requirement.

- Iowa Code §261B.9 requires disclosure to students of information about the school's programs, charges, tuition refund policies, whether a certificate or diploma awarded by the school is applicable toward a degree program the school offers, and the identity of the school's accrediting agency. These disclosures are in place and available to students through the University Catalog and at specific webpages on the school website.
 - ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/online/curriculum/management/#courseinventory>.
 - ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/online/curriculum/RNtoBSN/#majortext>.
 - ✓ <https://online.mtmercy.edu/rn-bsn/>.
 - ✓ <https://online.mtmercy.edu/bachelor-hr/>.
 - ✓ <https://online.mtmercy.edu/bachelor-business/>.
 - ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/online/tuitionandfees/>.
 - ✓ <http://catalog.mtmercy.edu/welcometomountmercyuniversity/>.
 - ✓ <https://online.mtmercy.edu/faqs/>.

Iowa Code §261B.7 states that, while a school must not represent that it is "approved" or "accredited" by the Commission or the State of Iowa, a registered school must disclose that the school is registered by the Commission on behalf of the state of Iowa and provide the Commission's contact information for students who wish to inquire about the school or file a complaint. Mount Mercy discloses the Commission's information on its site for students to utilize should they need the information to file a complaint.

- ✓ http://www.MountMercy.edu/uploadedFiles/Pages/Marketing/Publications/Official_University_Documents/catlog-addendum.pdf.

Financial Responsibility: Mount Mercy University submitted the financial audit report of an independent accounting firm, McGladrey, dated February 13, 2015, for the institutional financial position ending June 30, 2014. The accounting firm stated its opinion that the school's financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the school's financial position.

A private non-profit school that participates in the federal student aid programs must maintain a composite score, based on a three-factor financial responsibility ratio, of at least 1.5 in order to be determined by the federal Department of Education to be financially responsible without additional oversight. Mount Mercy's independent auditor did not report nor test the Mount Mercy's financial responsibility composite score. The most recent financial responsibility composite score reported for Mount Mercy by the federal Department of Education is for the institutional fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, when Mount Mercy's composite score was 2.8 (out of a possible 3.0).

Full-Time Iowa Resident Faculty Member or Program Coordinator: Mount Mercy University is an Iowa based school employing several full-time and part-time Iowa based faculty members. Additional information about faculty appears below.

Instructional/Supervisory Staff Qualifications: Mount Mercy maintains easily accessible information about faculty on its website, organized by program, at <https://www.mtmercy.edu/academics>. Staff reviewed a sampling of faculty profiles for the online programs.

Bachelor of Business Administration: Of nine faculty reviewed between them they hold two doctorate degrees, two are certified public accountants, and hold ten master's degrees.

RN to BSN: Of 17 faculty reviewed between them they hold four doctorate degrees and 16 masters, of which 13 are in nursing.

Masters of Criminal Justice: Of three faculty reviewed all have a doctorate degree.

Commitment to Iowa Students and Teach-Out. By executing an electronic signature on the registration application, Mount Mercy University President Laurie Hamen, J.D. committed to the delivery of programs Mount Mercy offers and agreed to provide alternatives for students to complete programs at Mount Mercy or another school if Mount Mercy closes a program, or if Mount Mercy closes before students have completed their courses of study.

Additional Information

Compliance with Iowa Code §714

§714.18 – Evidence of Financial Responsibility

Mount Mercy University is exempt from the financial responsibility (i.e., bonding) requirements of Iowa Code §714.18. Mount Mercy qualifies for the following exemption listed in Iowa Code §714.19(10): "Private nonprofit schools that meet the criteria established under Iowa Code §261.9(1)." The criteria established under Iowa Code §261.9(1), is the *institutional* eligibility criteria that qualifies a school for participation in the Iowa Tuition Grant Program. Mount Mercy meets the institutional eligibility criteria, and therefore qualifies for the financial responsibility exemption. For this purpose, whether a school actually awards funds from the Iowa Tuition Grant Program is immaterial.

§714.23 – State Tuition Refund Policy

The Iowa tuition refund policy does not apply to Mount Mercy University because it is a private nonprofit institution.

Compliance with Iowa Code §261F

Mount Mercy University posts on its website a Code of Conduct for Educational Loans addresses provisions of Iowa Code §261F. The Mount Mercy Code of Conduct appears to be an accurate and comprehensive reflection of Iowa Code provisions that govern certain aspects of business relationships between private education loan lenders and school personnel who have responsibilities related to education loans. Staff finds no evidence that the school participates in any preferred lender arrangement or otherwise refers its enrolled students to any specific private education loan lender. The website provides generic consumer information that students should consider when evaluating and selecting a private education loan lender.

- ✓ <https://www.mtmercy.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/admissions/MountMercyUniversityFinancialAidCodeofConduct.pdf>.
- ✓ <https://www.mtmercy.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/admissions/PrivateEducationLoans.pdf>.