

Consumer Awareness Guide

Seven Traps to Avoid When Choosing a Surgical Assistant Program

3rd Edition

By Dan Bump

You'll Discover

- How to Avoid Seven Ad Traps.
- 2 Absolute Essentials of a Great Program.
- 3 Big Ways to Eliminate Your Risk.
- Successfully Pursuing Your Surgical Dream.

This is an educational service provided by the
American Center for Excellence in Surgical Assisting, Inc.

© ACESA, Inc July 2007. All rights reserved.

Consumer Awareness Guide

Thank you for making this Consumer Awareness Guide a resource in your search for an effective, convenient, and budget-friendly Surgical Assistant Program. It was written with Surgical Techs, OR Nurses, PAs, and NPs in mind. But it is also excellent for OR Managers and Directors of Surgical Services who make education decisions for their staff.

My name is Dan Bump and I'm grateful for this opportunity to provide you with highly important but little-known facts about first assistant training in America. Unfortunately, there are also lies and half-truths you as an education consumer should be protected from. This Consumer Awareness Guide will help you get past the lies and hype so you can choose the best program *for you* and/or your staff.

This Guide will help you navigate the array of programs available, understand where you might get into hot water, and resist any high-pressure attempts to manipulate you or to enroll you or your staff in a program that is not right for you.

What qualifies me to write on this subject? I have been in the forefront of creating the training industry for Surgical Assistants. I developed the very first formal, distance learning Surgical Assistant Program for the working OR professional. Since 1989 I've been training Surgical Techs, OR Nurses, and others to first assist in surgery and to achieve the highest levels of success. Currently, I am the Program Director of the nationally acclaimed American Center for Excellence in Surgical Assisting (ACESA).

In my time, I've seen a lot of misleading advertisements. Armed with insider information I've collected over the years, you will finally have the street smarts you need to be on full alert to the traps and avoid getting stuck in a program not suited for you.


I will be referring to the ACESA program in this Guide as a means of illustrating just how the standards you'll be reading about are implemented in a real-life model program. Am I biased? Maybe, but you won't have to take my word for anything you read here. You'll be able to judge it for yourself because ACESA Standards are just plain common sense. You should insist on them with any program you choose. So let's get started with...

How to Avoid Seven Ad Traps

1 The Old Bait and Switch

They bait you with what sounds like a gold-standard program and then switch to less expensive training to get a fast sale. One school says taking a program without their particular kind of college credits (there aren't different kinds) would be a waste of your time and money. They boldly claim employers won't even recognize your training with college credits from other schools.

Strong words from a school willing to drop this standard like a hot potato and sell you their program *without college credits!* Didn't they just say your employer wouldn't recognize your training without them? This same school will sell you their program without hands-on training to further reduce the price. What kind of school guts their program of essential features just to sell you something?

 **Raise a red flag** if the school lies to you about any feature of their program. These features are either essential or they aren't. If they lie to you about the importance of their college credits or hands-on training, what else are they lying about?

The ACESA Model: We don't include any feature in our program that isn't essential for student success. When you call ACESA, we won't lie or negotiate you down. We may even lose sales because of it. But we sleep better at night knowing our students are happy and getting exactly what they need to be successful.

2 The REAL Training, Live Tissue Controversy

This school offers training on live pigs! They set their trap by advertising ‘live tissue’ training as REAL training and the ONLY WAY to train assistants. The second lie they tell is all other schools waste your money on what they call *simulated training*, which they ridicule calling it ‘cutting on foam and rubber in a hotel room.’

All training is REAL, not simulated. But this school slyly uses the word ‘simulated’ instead of ‘simulation’ in order to give potential students the false impression that their competitors offer fake training. They argue assistants must learn skills ‘the way surgeons learn’ – on live tissue (remember... pigs!). In REAL life, surgeons, pilots, astronauts, and now surgical assistants learn skills on thoughtfully engineered simulators. Afterwards you must apply your new skills on live tissue (human) with supervision and feedback from qualified surgeons. Go to www.acesatraining.com and you can read an article in the New England Journal of Medicine that *champions simulation training over animal or cadaver training*.

What about training in hotel rooms? This paints a picture of training in seedy hotel sleeping rooms. They should say ‘hotel conference centers’ but they don’t in order to misrepresent their competitors to prospective students.



Raise a red flag when a school bad-mouths, lies about, and misrepresents their competition in places they should be telling you about their own program – such as in their school catalog. Lying about their competitors is a sure sign they *can’t provide evidence* they are better.

The ACESA Model: Provide extensive simulation training as preclinical preparation so students can perform skillfully on vulnerable patients in the presence of judgmental surgeons. Make skills training mobile so it can be presented in hospitals and hotel conference centers around the country. We also let students retake the skill lab as many times as they want to ensure that a highly competent individual is working in the OR.

3 The Incredible College Credit

Some schools lie on the phone about the *transferability* of their college credits. The truth is no program can guarantee transferability! Just read the school catalog for the official position. In one case, the salesman led a prospect to believe their credits would transfer and the school catalog said they were NOT transferable, NOT EVEN WITHIN THAT SAME COMMUNITY COLLEGE! This program offers just a few college credits so they hype them to make theirs sound like the only legitimate credits around.

Another school catalog states, “Some programs offer **50+ credits**, only for you to later find out that they are worthless because the program itself is unaccredited.” The lie here is the *worth of a college credit* is determined by each receiving college or university upon reviewing the curriculum, not by an accrediting organization. The *number of credits* is regulated by the state’s Board of Higher Education and is based on the volume of training.



Raise a red flag if the school is claiming transferability. Insist on seeing verification. Hold their feet to the fire. Make sure you aren’t fooled by any school hyping their college credits. You aren’t buying credits. You are shopping for a program that will make a difference in your future!

The ACESA Model: ACESA became a vocational college so we could award our students the number of college credits rightfully earned without regard for the cost of the credit. In our case, the state authorized 52 credits because the program was so comprehensive. The problem of affiliating with a college rather than becoming one is the college charges a fee per credit awarded. The program will naturally limit the number of credits to keep their costs down.

4 Coming to a rural town near you!

One scam is to advertise classes in too many locations with absolutely no intention of presenting most of them. The hidden strategy is to lure one or two students from each location. After they are locked into a contract, the class is canceled and the duped students must fly to a distant class at their own expense.

Canceling a class is legal but you should have the option of staying in the program and rescheduling or getting out with a refund you can live with. Only believe a refund policy if it is in writing. You should be able to find a valid policy in both the school catalog and enrollment form. Make sure it is enough to protect you from being ripped off by this scheduling scam or even a legitimate cancellation. If the only refund policy is ‘your money back within 3 days of enrolling,’ you’ll end up paying the entire tuition even if you withdraw from the program.



Raise a red flag if the school advertises too many classes and it seems unlikely they could present them all. Be cautious of schools with a reputation for canceling classes. Always look for valid refund policy to be written both in the school catalog and enrollment form.

The ACESA Model: Our policy is to never cancel a class with 2 or more students even if the class is presented at a financial loss. A reputation for dependability is far too important to us. We present most of our classes in or near major cities to encourage enrollment. If you ever see us advertise a ‘rural’ location, it is because we would be presenting the class in a hospital at their invitation.

5 Hying Accreditation

Accreditation guarantees students a minimum standard of quality and credibility. It is a valuable assurance but accreditation isn’t proof a program has achieved the ‘highest standards’ as one school claims. Just look at our public school system. All public schools are accredited but there is a huge difference in the quality of training from one school to the other. So much depends on how far the school *exceeds* the minimum standards with their curriculum, teaching methods, and the instructors’ real-world experience and expertise.



Raise a red flag if the school hypes or makes too much of their accredited status and/or dishonestly and unfairly uses it to discredit other programs. If accreditation is featured too prominently, they may not have anything else substantial to show you. You should quickly look for another program.

The ACESA Model: We created a program that builds on and then exceeds accreditation standards. Now we are actively demonstrating to students our real commitment to accreditation. We’ve made application for and we are now fully engaged in the accreditation process. The self-study has been completed and reviewed, site visits have been conducted, and everything is looking great at this point. We are 100% committed to accreditation but our most prominent program feature will always be quality of training and success of our students.

6 Those money hungry schools

Some schools accuse their competitors of being money hungry or of thinking only about money. They also accuse competitors of blatantly appealing to a prospect’s love of money by luring them into their programs with a ‘get rich quick’ philosophy.

I don’t know of any school that even suggests much less promotes the idea you can get rich quick as a Surgical Assistant. I’ve made a 6-figure income myself though I wouldn’t call it getting rich – quick or otherwise.



Raise a red flag if a school ‘trash talks’ their competitors. Being interested in money is true of ALL schools. They can’t run a program without it. The honest question is, ‘what do they offer for the money?’ Then you can judge for yourself if the program is worth it.

The ACESA Model: One of the reasons I created the ACESA Surgical Assistant Program is so my students would be able to accomplish what I did – have their dream job in surgery with independence and a 6-figure income. We don’t have a ‘get rich quick’ philosophy. But I do believe sincerely that if I did it, others can too.

7 Emotionally Charged Words That Make You Stop Thinking

Some schools use emotionally charged words to plant seeds of fear and distrust and make you ‘feel’ uneasy with other programs. Words like ‘ineligible’, ‘waste of your money’, ‘no quality guidelines’, ‘don’t meet standards’, ‘not accredited’, ‘put the student at risk’, ‘credits not worth anything’ are used, not as accurate descriptions, but to force prospects to react emotionally, stop thinking, stop looking, and sign up now!

For example, they may claim you’ll be ‘ineligible’ for (their favorite) certification if you take another program. The emotional response they want from you is the fear you won’t be able to get legitimately certified. The rest of the truth is other programs may make you eligible for other widely recognized assisting certifications.



Raise a red flag if a school paints their competitors in scary terms. Don’t stop asking questions! If you give in to emotionally-charged advertising or sales pitches, you could enroll in a program that doesn’t meet your needs. Don’t let anyone manipulate your emotions. Get all the information and make a logical decision in your own best interests.

The ACESA Model: We tell you about the benefits of our program without disparaging other programs. We even help you find another program if ours won’t work for you. A formal program must lead to surgical assisting certification. Currently, our program is approved by the American Board of Surgical Assistants so our students can earn the SA-C title. When we finish the accreditation process, we will open up eligibility for other certifications and other widely recognized titles so our students can choose the best option for them.

2 Essentials of a Great Program

1 This is a program I can take! For instance, you may be eligible but a program is not truly available if you can’t afford it, or your employer won’t pay for it, or it doesn’t qualify for tuition reimbursement. It also isn’t truly available if you have to quit work to be in the program.

2 I know this program will give me the success I am looking for! Your program must help you perform at the highest levels so you won’t lose opportunities. If your goal is to be independent when you graduate, make sure your school can help you get started and run a successful surgical assisting service.

Here are questions to help you figure out if the program is truly great:

Is the program in my price range? Price doesn’t say anything about the greatness of a program. You can’t assume the more expensive course must be the best or the least expensive course must be inferior. Once you find a course you can afford, you need to ask more questions.

The ACESA Model: We pride ourselves in offering one of the most affordable tuitions. And not to leave anybody out, we also offer an *easy* payment plan for students who can’t afford the full price. We also offer training to students all over the United States and do not charge a higher tuition to out-of-state students.

Does the program award college credits? It’s helpful if you want to apply for tuition reimbursement. Also, if you are working towards a degree, some of these credits may apply. Is the school awarding you all the college credit you worked hard for or are they cutting back on the award because they have to pay a community college a large fee for each credit?

The ACESA Model: We award 52 college credits as authorized by Colorado Department of Higher Education.

How long will I need to take off from work? Many programs require you to take as little as 6 days off from work. You may need to quit work in order to take some full-time programs. Some schools may offer less than 6 days of hands-on. Be careful with these programs. You may graduate ill equipped to apply the skills and techniques required of a Surgical Assistant.

The ACESA Model: We have 6 days of hands-on training. This is long enough to be comprehensive with plenty of time for practice and one-on-one coaching but short enough to be acceptable to employers. And we have a Lifetime Skills Guarantee that eliminates any worries 6 days isn't enough to learn all of those skills. Our students can retake the surgical skill lab as many times as they want for free.

How comprehensive is the curriculum? You don't want to have to be in school forever. But you do want your training to be comprehensive enough to support tremendous success in surgery? Analyze how much you will learn and what you will learn.

The ACESA Model: Our curriculum includes all the content required for accreditation plus we exceed standards by including all of the additional content necessary for a successful surgical career. The curriculum is fully outlined in our school catalog, immediately downloadable from our web site.

How practical is the preclinical, hands-on training? Your hands-on training must include wound closure, assisting technique, and surgical technique. It must be substantial and not just 2-4 hours of suturing and tying on a pig's foot. You should learn skills and then practice them in situations that accurately simulate real life. You should learn the trade secrets that only seasoned experts in the field can give you.

Since your hands-on skills training is so vital to your success, the program should include a REAL skills guarantee. One school advertises a Lifetime Learning Program (LLP) that permits graduates to take *all* of their hands-on workshops or courses for free, except you can't retake the surgical assistant program pig lab for free. Some students have enrolled in their Surgical Assistant Program because they believed the LLP was a skills guarantee. Further, the LLP is worthless because there doesn't appear to be any workshops available. There aren't any listed on the web site and there haven't been any advertised for a long time.

The ACESA Model: The ACESA skills guarantee says if you haven't acquired all the skills taught in the surgical skill lab to *your* complete satisfaction, you can retake the lab as many times as you think necessary – *absolutely free!* There are no strings, no questions asked. This guarantee is included in the tuition and students retaking the lab aren't even required to pay lab fees to cover costs. Our enrollment forms and school catalog specify the guarantee *in writing*. With 2 classes scheduled almost every month and listed on our web site, you have plenty of opportunities for retakes. Our Lifetime Skill Guarantee is as real as it gets.

Can I read some of your testimonials? Don't rely on what a salesman says about their program. What do students and graduates say about their experience. Are the instructors, the curriculum, and the hands-on training well spoken of? One school has had a testimonial link on their web site for well over a year saying you can read testimonials from REAL students. During that entire time, when you click the link you get a note saying the page is under construction and will be up soon. As long as this school has had a REAL link, and REAL students, it has had absolutely no REAL testimonials.

The ACESA Model: We've always known it's not what we tell you, it's what our students say that makes a real difference. Our web site is full of endorsements and praise from our students and graduates. And we don't make a point of telling you they are REAL students. Stating the obvious here is to wrongly imply that other schools don't have real students or that their testimonials are made up.

Can I get my clinical experience in just one specialty? If they say 'yes,' your training won't be success oriented. The clinical standards of some programs permit all of your cases to be done in one specialty, with one surgeon, and with one case (All tonsillectomies would satisfy your clinical requirements. Think of

what a great assistant you would become as a result of that experience!). Though very convenient, this is the ***ultimate training rip-off!***

A wide variety of surgical experiences will pay you amazing dividends. Hospitals have noted that assistants with multispecialty clinical training are superior and receive more surgeon requests. They just handle themselves better.

The ACESA Model: We control the clinical experience. We outline the clinical objectives for your surgeon sponsors. We insist on a wide variety of experiences in multiple specialties. And we do it to exceed minimum accreditation standards but mostly to give you the best chance for outstanding success.

Where can I verify the school is legitimate? If the program is affiliated with a community college, call the college to verify the program. Also call the accrediting agency (if applicable). If the school is state authorized or approved, go to the state’s web site for verification.

The ACESA Model: We offer a link on our web site that will take you right to the state’s verification site.

Does your program lead to national certification? There are 4 first assisting titles you can earn through certification depending on your surgical background, the program you graduate from, and the credential that works best in your area.

Cert. Boards	Titles	Eligibility	First Assisting Programs	Required Degrees	Notes
NBSTSA	CFA	ST, CST, LPN, LVN, RN, PA, MD	CAAHEP Accredited programs	None	None
NSAA	CSA	ST, CST, LPN, LVN, RN, PA, MD	CAAHEP Accredited or Approved programs	AD	None
ABSA	SA-C	ST, CST, LPN, LVN, RN, PA, MD	CAAHEP Accredited or Approved programs	AD	Specific courses are required in addition to a degree
CCI	CRNFA	RN with CNOR	CCI accepted RNFA programs	BSN	Also need 2000 hours of first assisting experience before sitting for exam

What is the refund policy? Does the program only give you the right of a full refund within 3 days? This will protect you from a high-pressure sales pitch. But after the 3 days, can you still receive a refund based on the amount of the program completed? Can you find the policy officially written in the catalog and enrollment form? What other guarantees does the school offer to assure you are fully satisfied with your training? A full skills guarantee is the most important one.

The ACESA Model: Our refund policy is among the most generous in the industry. You receive a full refund if you withdraw within 3 days of enrolling. If you withdraw later, you still receive a refund based on the amount of the program you took (see school catalog and enrollment form for details). We eliminate the risk of working with us and then we guarantee. We give you a full, no-questions-asked skills guarantee! We even guarantee you a 6-figure income if you utilize our Mentoring program to help you become a self-employed Surgical Assistant!

Can the faculty help you achieve your employment objectives? If you want self-employment for example, is there someone on the staff with the success you want so they can help with marketing, billing, etc?

The ACESA Model: We didn’t just develop a highly successful learning system. We also created a post-graduate system for developing high levels of expertise or mastery as an assistant. And then we launched an

effective medical billing system and a mentoring program where graduates can be guided step-by-step to start and run a successful Surgical Assisting service.

3 Big Ways to Eliminate Your Risk

1. **Research** your options as described above. Don't succumb to any high-pressure, emotional sales strategies or smear & fear tactics that short-cut your research.
2. Get the students and graduates to tell you how good the program is. **Testimonials** should be numerous and immediately available on the school web site. You should be able to read about students who have had the exact same training experience you are looking for.
3. After you've found a program, there is still some chance the program will turn out completely wrong for you. Schools confident in their training will reduce your risk with a **Money-Back Guarantee**. You must be able to withdraw from the program for any reason without owing the full tuition.

Successfully Pursuing Your Surgical Dream

Develop the right attitude and make a commitment to yourself. Your dreams matter! So don't be casual about them. Get rid of the career-killing attitude "If I get to assist great, if not I'll live" and substitute the determined career-building attitude 'I **am** going to assist no matter what! I'll get trained and certified – nobody can stop me! If somebody tells me 'no,' it will make me even more determined than ever. I will not be denied!'

List your objectives. What precisely is your dream? What does it look like? What does it feel like? Make it crystal clear. Your chances of success are increased exponentially if you put your dream in writing along with a plan or a list of objectives to accomplish it. So sit down for 30 minutes to an hour undistracted and write down everything you want from your career.

You don't just want to become a Surgical Assistant. You want to get closer to the surgery; you want increased responsibility; you want to apply your surgical skills not just hold retractors; you want more autonomy; you want more money (how much more?); you want to effectively address the issue of liability; you want the happiness and satisfaction you deserve; you want job security; and so much more. Write it ALL down!

When you find the right program, ACT! Once you know what you want and what you have to do to get it, you must take decisive action! Procrastination will kill your dreams. Waiting to see if your employer will pay for it delays your dreams and sucks the life out of them. ***Don't let that happen!***

My best advice to you is to decide what you want, plan it out, and then do it. Don't wait on someone else. Pay for it yourself and then apply for tuition reimbursement – especially if the program has an easy payment plan and offers college credits. Show your employer you are serious and will not be denied. Most employers are more inclined to help you with your tuition ***after*** you have displayed this kind of determination and unstopableness.

I hope this Consumer Awareness Guide has been helpful to you whether you are an OR Manager, Director of Surgical Services, Chief of Surgery, OR Nurse, Surgical Tech, or other healthcare professional. I want to thank you for taking your valuable time to read it and to give the points presented your serious consideration. If there is anything else we can do, even help you find another program if ours isn't right for you, please don't hesitate to give us a call at 1-888-221-5992.

Best wishes from all of us here at ACESA as you seek training that is best for you or your staff.

Comparison of Program Features

Didactic (book learning)	Preclinical hands-on training	Clinical Internship
<u>Classroom</u> – may have to quit work.	The ACESA Model <u>Simulation training</u> – as 6 days of extensive wound closure technique, assisting technique, and surgical technique with a real Lifetime Skills Guarantee. Very convenient because labs are mobile and can be brought to the student’s region of the country.	The ACESA Model <u>Guided, multiple-specialty clinical experience</u> – with specific clinical objectives. The school, based on its experience with developing successful Surgical Assistants, takes responsibility for the kinds of clinical experiences the student must receive before they can graduate.
The ACESA Model <u>Internet</u> – the most convenient format, schedule around work, can offer audio and video applications.	<u>Cadaver or animal training</u> – much the same advantages of simulation training. The convenience of mobility is sacrificed and retraining or refresher training can be cost prohibitive. (See New England Journal of Medicine article)	<u>Unguided, single-specialty clinical experience</u> – with no clinical objectives. Although multispecialty is recommended, the agenda for training is left entirely up to a local sponsoring surgeon. The school only takes responsibility for how many first assisting cases or hours the student logs.
<u>Correspondence</u> – some convenience is sacrificed with waiting for assignments and tests to be mailed. There may also be extra costs related to the postal service.	<u>Wound closure only</u> – may be as much as a day or two or as little as 2-4 hours of suturing on pig’s feet.	
	<u>Video wound closure only</u> – no feedback or fine-tuning from a qualified instructor.	
	<u>No hands-on training</u> – even the basics are left up to your local surgeons who expected you to get this kind of training from your teachers.	

Praise from happy ACESA clients...

“As a new graduate from a Registered Nurse First Assistant Program, I am very happy that I decided to attend your Surgical Skill Lab. I found it to be very informative in all aspects of Surgical Assistance. I have learned a lot in these 6 days. I knew the basics but now I feel more comfortable assisting in all types of surgery. My suturing and tying techniques have greatly improved. I think that you should consider getting on the approved list for the Competency and Credentials Institute (CCI) for Registered Nurse First Assistant Certification. You have a very good program which would attract a lot of nurses who want to become first assistants. Thank you for all your help.”

Maria Colon-Bloschock, RN, CNOR, RNFA
Columbus Hospital, Newark, NJ

“I made the right choice when I picked ACESA to get my training from. The staff was very helpful and knowledgeable, and they want me to succeed. The skill lab was great. I learned things I did not know after scrubbing for 10 years. You gain the knowledge you need to start your clinicals. You are not just thrown to the wolves and told to find a Dr. to teach you. I can not say enough about this program. Even if I never first assist, I know I am a much better scrub nurse for having taken this course. The knowledge I have gained will be immeasurable.”

Theresa Walker, CST, SA-C
Legacy Emanuel Hospital, Portland, OR

"The 6 day surgical lab is a class that every scrub tech or, for that matter, any person working in the operating room could greatly benefit from. You might think that you already know how to do certain things but, more than likely, you are not doing them the correct way. I have learned more attending this class than I ever could in all my years of scrubbing. Dan Bump, the instructor, made the class very interesting, he was very patient, and he covered so much material. This class would definitely be one to recommend to others. You never stop learning. I had a great time."

Terri Brown, LPN, ST
Southside Regional Medical Center, Petersburg, VA

"This week has been such an adventure. On top of being a great learning experience, it has been fun. Having a relaxed learning environment helps the learning process. These exercises have been very helpful in incorporating all the techniques that we have learned. This course was an excellent resource. I feel more confident and competent to assist in surgery."

Gloria D. Jackson, RN, BSN, CNOR, SA-C
South Lake Hospital, Clermont, FL

"This program (lab) has given me the confidence I need to start my clinical rotation. I feel that the skills I learned I will be able to use the rest of my career. I can't wait to get started on Monday. The ACESA online Surgical Assistant Program is the best economical choice for my busy schedule."

Manuel J. Mier Jr., ST
Methodist Ambulatory Surgery Center, San Antonio, TX

"From my first phone call to ACESA, I could feel the company was behind me 100%. I was very happy with the way Dan encourages people not to give up on themselves and never makes you feel you are less than what you are. I loved being able to actually sew and make incisions. It definitely helped me use the skills that I was learning in class everyday. I believe it will make me a better assistant as well as scrub tech because of all the role playing. The program is educational, professional, and fun! It was so much fun to role play and use our new skills. The simulators were excellent and the instructor Dan was very knowledgeable and has the gift to explain techniques so that everyone understands them. His patience is phenomenal!!"

Mary Lynn Fury, CST
St Clair Hospital, Pittsburg, PA

"Excellent course, excellent instructor. Everyone who works in an OR should take this course whether they want to first assist or not. Anatomy presentation is great. Each student is given individual attention and Dan Bump is extremely patient. It is impossible to imagine learning this volume of information in just 6 days. Thank you!"

JoDee Myers, RN, SA-C, Director of Surgical Services
Harrison Community Hospital, Cadiz, OH

For more testimonial comments go to www.acesatraining.com

or feel free to give us a call at 1-888-221-5992 for more information!