

## **Testimony Provided for the United States Department of Education**

At the Public Hearing on the Establishment of  
Negotiated Rulemaking for Programs Authorized Under  
Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965  
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By  
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My name is Jan Friis and I serve as the Vice President of Government Affairs for the Council for Higher Education Accreditation also referred as CHEA. CHEA is a national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation. CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations.

CHEA recognizes 21 specialized accreditors that the Department of Education does not recognize because these accreditors are not Title IV gatekeepers. As an example, CHEA recognizes the Council on Aviation Accreditation, which accredits air traffic and professional piloting programs, in addition to other programs, because the majority of the programs are degree granting. The Department of Education does not recognize this accreditor because aviation is not a Title IV gatekeeper. In contrast, the Department of Education recognizes the National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences. CHEA does not because most of its institutions are not degree granting. I think we can all agree that it is important to review and recognize any accreditor who is a Title IV gatekeeper. I believe that we all agree that any program that accredits professional piloting and air traffic control programs should also be reviewed and when qualified, recognized.

Throughout these hearings you have heard about what accreditation is doing and that Negotiated Rulemaking should occur after the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. I believe it is important that there be a review of the fundamentals of accreditation for the record.

Accreditation is the primary symbol of a legitimate institution of higher education and has been so for the last 100 years. It is the threshold litmus test for academic quality at an institution. There are currently 7,000 higher education institutions and 17,000 programs that are recognized.

Not only is accreditation required for student access to federal and state loans and grants. It is required for an institution to received federal and state funds for research and operations. Also accreditation is the gateway for private foundation and corporate support of institutions.

The current national structure of accreditation has encouraged and grown with major innovations in education such as with the development of community colleges, the advent of distance

learning and the growth of for-profit education. It is a major source of protection against fraud and abuse of students and other consumers of higher education. In addition, it is currently the primary bulwark against degree mills.

This national structure is a private enterprise which is operated by 81 recognized accrediting organizations with 650 full- and part-time staff. It involves 16,000 volunteers. In 2004-2005 accreditors took major action with regard to approximately 1,200 institutions and 3,800 programs. All of this is accomplished on a \$70 million dollar private budget. The federal government could not replicate this level of action with this degree of community involvement on the same budget.

The accreditation community is responsive in the current climate of accountability. Its organizations have made significant progress with student learning outcomes, improving institutional performance, improving transfer of credit and is moving toward greater transparency. CHEA has set forth an accountability agenda in testimony given by CHEA President Judith Eaton to Secretary Spelling's Commission on the Future of Higher Education on April 6, 2006 which will further improve accreditation.

The current accreditation system is vital in maintaining the key features of higher education that have contributed to keeping the enterprise as among the best in the world. The current system is mission based accreditation among a diverse array of institutions. It allows institutional independence for academic judgment that permits the academic freedom which is vital in an open and free society.

Additional federal control of accreditation is not needed. Our current national structure of accreditation has proven to be a highly successful and well-tested system of quality assurance and quality improvement. The current system of accreditation and federal interaction is an outstanding example of the effective government use of the results from a private regulatory system. Accreditation is the premier national example of reliable and responsible self-regulation.

Thank you.