

Presentation to the

***National Advisory Committee On
Institutional Quality And Integrity***

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Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

- Formed in 1996 as a private, nonprofit organization through a referendum of college and university presidents.
- Established to provide national coordination of institutional (regional and national) and programmatic accreditation.
- Sustains a current membership of approximately 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities.
- Has recognized (scrutinized for quality based on CHEA standards) approximately 60 accrediting organizations.
- Is governed by a 17-member board of directors elected by the CHEA membership.

CHEA Recognition

The primary purpose of CHEA recognition is to assure, through accreditation, that institutions and programs meet expectations of threshold academic quality and ongoing quality improvement.

CHEA Recognition and Federal Recognition

- CHEA recognition of accrediting organizations emerged from higher education's longstanding commitment to strive for academic excellence through self-regulation. To be CHEA-recognized, accrediting organizations must provide evidence that, in relation to the institutions and programs under review, they (1) advance academic quality, (2) demonstrate accountability, (3) encourage purposeful change and needed improvement, (4) employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision-making and (5) continually reassess accreditation practices.
- Federal recognition of accrediting organizations emerged from a federal interest that students who receive financial aid are attending institutions and programs that are administratively and fiscally sound. To be federally recognized, accrediting organizations must meet recognition standards that require review of institutions and programs with respect to facilities, equipment and supplies; recruiting and admissions practices; a record of student complaints; and a record of compliance with responsibilities of Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA) as well as academic capacity such as student achievement, curricula, and faculty.

Both CHEA recognition and federal recognition serve the public interest, but in different ways. Recognition is a vital feature of the strong public-private partnership that both higher education and accreditation have sustained with the federal government for more than 50 years. The core of this partnership is a commitment that higher education, accreditation and the federal government will work together to assure access, affordability and quality in U.S. higher education to millions of college-bound students.

The National Advisory Committee's June 10, 2003 letter to the Secretary captures this balance of public and private responsibilities. In many ways, it reflects the beliefs underlying the CHEA's approach to reauthorization (discussed below) as well as providing a blueprint for the future of our accreditation-federal government relationship.

December 8, 2003

The Chea Reauthorization Agenda For Accreditation And Accountability Reform

CHEA has developed an agenda for the current reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. This *Agenda*, approved by the CHEA Board of Directors in April 2003, addresses four areas of concern and interest to accreditation, higher education, the Congress, the United States Department of Education (USDE), and NACIQI: student learning outcomes, distance learning, transfer of credit, and information to the public.

Perhaps most important, the CHEA *Agenda* approaches accreditation and these areas of interest and concern based on a set of beliefs that we think are central to sustaining the accreditation–federal government relationship:

- A belief in the *success, value and effectiveness* of accreditation to make sound judgments about academic quality in higher education;
- A belief in two fundamental values that have been central to the success of U.S. higher education: the *autonomy of our institutions and programs* and the *academic freedom* of our faculty and researchers;
- A belief in maintaining accreditation as a *viable private, self-regulatory enterprise*, not an arm of the government; and
- A belief in the value of the current *mission-based, decentralized structure* in which both higher education and accreditation operate to assure and improve quality.

Using these beliefs as a structure for concerted action by higher education and accreditation, the *Agenda* commits CHEA to additional steps in relation to student learning outcomes, distance learning, transfer of credit and information to the public. By implication, the *Agenda* seeks to discourage initiatives that we believe will weaken higher education and academic quality and diminish the accreditation-federal government relationship. The *Agenda*:

- Supports higher education and accreditation doing more with *student learning outcomes*, provided that evidence of outcomes and success with regard to outcomes are determined by institutions and programs. We suggest that government rely on institutions, programs and accreditors here rather than determining this evidence and success on its own.
- Urges higher education and accreditation to sustain and enhance *assuring quality in distance learning*. This is being done successfully under the current federal recognition standards. We suggest that government refrain from requiring duplicate accreditation reviews or a combination of redundant government and accreditation reviews.
- Urges higher education and accreditation to pay more attention to *transfer of credit*, especially to assure that judgments about transfer requests are not based solely on the accredited status of a sending institution. It is preferable that strategies and interventions for enhanced transfer be developed by institutions and programs rather than through government.
- Supports higher education and accreditation providing the public and students with *more information about academic quality and the accreditation process*, suggesting that institutions, programs and accreditors develop these messages, not government.

In the context of the set of beliefs described above, the CHEA *Agenda* is a call for enhanced accountability in higher education and accreditation. Realizing this agenda would mean that that institutions, programs and accreditors are indeed held responsible for vigorous action in response to the interests and concerns of students, the government and the public. At the same time, higher education and accreditation would sustain the needed flexibility and discretion to exercise good judgment about what these actions are to be.