

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

THE CHEA INITIATIVE

2009 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**SECOND NATIONAL ACCREDITATION FORUM
JANUARY 27, 2009**

ROUNDTABLE COMMENTS

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) held its second National Accreditation Forum on January 27, 2009 in Washington DC. The forum was part of the CHEA Annual Conference that attracted 300 people from higher education, accreditation, associations, federal and state government, the international community and the public.

One of the forum sessions included roundtable conversations during which attendees were asked to share their thoughts with regard to the two goals of the CHEA Initiative, a multi-year discussion launched by CHEA to both further strengthen accreditation and to rethink the federal government-accreditation relationship. Written roundtable comments and suggestions are below, presented as CHEA received them.

GOAL 1: ENHANCING THE STRENGTH AND CREDIBILITY OF ACCREDITATION

1. Educating/demystifying what accreditation is.
2. Responsibly communicate what accreditation is.
3. It's got to start at home, buy-in among the internal constituents. It's not a given this exists.
4. It's creating relevancy.
5. Assumption: Accreditation serves the academy (students), it serves the community itself.
6. Need to be credible to two audiences – academy and students/parents etc.
7. Also institutions vs. government oversight.
8. Increase significantly faculty involvement in the accreditation process, and not just through greater participation of faculty senates and heads of academic units. Bring teaching faculty, perhaps concentrated in distribution from a small number of academic units, into the process. This way, a serious discussion of teaching and learning methodology among expert colleagues familiar with the same set of courses can take place. Share findings widely so that faculty at other schools (but who teach in the same disciplines) can benefit. By increasing the utility of accreditation to institutional improvement, all will benefit.
9. Learn to manage accreditation in the face of internationalization of footprint of institutions of higher education.
10. Pull the trigger on "bad" programs.
11. Buy in of profession on standards revisions.

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GOAL 1: ENHANCING THE STRENGTH AND CREDIBILITY OF ACCREDITATION (continued)

12. Focus on outcomes (more?).
13. Focus on process (less?).
14. Public relations/ transparency.
15. Tuition cuts.
16. Transfer of credit.
17. Transparency in process:
 - a) Colleges: acceptance rates, retention rates, employment (placement) rates – make available online within one click of homepage.
 - b) Accrediting Bodies: number of programs reviewed, pass rate, include student voice on board – make available online within one click of homepage.
18. Clearer statement of what trying to fix (hearing this from accreditors).
19. Greater emphasis on student learning outcomes.
20. Transparency – although never certain what public concerns are and how to be responsive (teaching graduates?).
21. “Raising the bar” so accreditation is more meaningful re quality.
22. Develop a public, multi-stakeholder [institutions, accreditors, state higher eds, federal higher eds, public/parent groups, business from a broad base etc., educational scholars, faculty, foundations etc.] forum for review, debate and planning around the five issues discussed by Stan Ikenberry. The group would develop and distribute widely a series of recommendations related to the strengthening of accreditation.
23. Of note, the present form of the *CHEA Initiative* may need to be reconsidered based on the output of this forum.
24. Address openly the mission-based standards value:
 - a) Is there nothing in common?
 - b) Doesn’t mean we must end up with a set of common “tests” but can there be a broader common understanding of what a degree “means”?

GOAL 2: RETHINKING THE ACCREDITATION-FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

1. Demonstrating that it works. Actions speak louder than words. The government will stay away if things are working. Prove it’s working.
2. When money is involved, there’s more focus. It’s very hard to separate the two. Everyone is looking for value for their money.
3. Accreditors and institutions need to be clearer what students/parents are getting for their college tuition \$.
4. Something happened to instigate the shift in focus. The public needs to see is it’s working, vs. focusing on a sound bite.
5. Answer to the question would be dependent on the output of the suggestion to question 1 (goal 1).

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GOAL NOT STIPULATED

1. How might higher education and accreditation further strengthen accreditation, thereby enhancing public confidence and trust in self-regulation?

Educate stakeholders: the public (re: process, purpose, and relevance, e.g., a primer on the website); the faculty (e.g. orientation showing how what they do and their role affects accreditation outcomes); staff, and consumers/students (re: relevance of accreditation).

Ensure that accreditation is a value-adding process for the institution and is part of their own quality-assurance mechanism (e.g. insight gained through the Self-study informs curriculum). Also use the process to inform accreditation standards and processes and to establish and publish benchmarks for Student Learning Outcomes.

Note, the issue of transparency and disclosures needs to be balanced by identifying both strengths and weaknesses in an institution, and reported in such a way that contributes to professional and public accountability.

2. How might higher education and accreditation work to refocus federal oversight of accreditation more directly on issues related to institutional viability and the use of federal funds, rather than the academic policy issues that are primarily the province of colleges and universities?

Doing well as described above in number 1 would enable institutions and accrediting bodies to demonstrate to the federal government how the body of evidence gained through accreditation is used to further institutional viability and accountability with the public (who pay taxes) with respect to efficient use of federal funds.

Oversight responsibility is not limited to the USDOE. An example of how to engage and refocus other federal regulatory entities is to engage them in accreditation in an advisory role. For example, the Aviation Accreditation Board International has an ex officio representative from the F.A.A. on their Board.

I hope this is helpful to CHEA in its role on behalf of higher education accreditation.

For additional information about the *CHEA Initiative*, visit the special section on the *Initiative* on the [CHEA Website](#).

To participate in this important discussion about the future of accreditation, send your comments and suggestions to CHEA at CHEAInitiative@chea.org.