

---

“Quality in American higher education is...self-regulated, a condition that is highly appreciated and closely guarded by the higher education establishment.”

“...the success of accreditation...is very much tied to presidential leadership and presidential engagement.”

“...accreditation is most effective when it is viewed as a partnership....”

---

---

*The Council for Higher Education Accreditation will serve students and their families, colleges and universities, sponsoring bodies, governments, and employers by promoting academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and will coordinate and work to advance self-regulation through accreditation.*

CHEA Mission Statement, 1996

---

*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

Council for Higher Education Accreditation

One Dupont Circle, NW • Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-955-6126 • Fax: 202-955-6129  
E-mail: [chea@chea.org](mailto:chea@chea.org) • URL: [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)



Council for  
Higher Education  
Accreditation

## Presidential Leadership in Accreditation

Presidential  
Guidelines  
Series, Vol. I

®  
CHEA

---

This *Presidential Guidelines Series* is the latest offering from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Presidents Project – a multi-year initiative to enhance presidential interest and investment in accreditation as a public policy issue. The series is an outgrowth of consultation with college and university presidents about the important role that accreditation plays at the institutional, state and federal level. The topics that are addressed emerged from various discussions, interviews and presentations on accreditation with chief executive officers representing all types of higher education institutions.

This series is based on two beliefs. First, the success of accreditation for individual institutions and for the entire higher education enterprise is very much tied to presidential leadership and presidential engagement. Presidential leadership is critical to the preservation of the self-regulatory concept nationally, and certainly presidential leadership is essential if institutions and programs are to achieve maximum benefit from the accrediting process. Second, accreditation is most effective when it is viewed as a partnership, an engagement of presidents, provosts and the campus community with accreditation professionals to assure and enhance the academic quality of an institution or program.

### **Background**

Higher education accreditation in the United States is unique in the world as an approach to institutional development and quality assurance because it is essentially owned and governed by the institutions and professions it serves. Unlike most nations, the U.S. has no federal ministry of education that controls curricula and educational policy, thereby affording American higher education great diversity and the opportunity to respond to the needs and desires of society in timely fashion. Accreditation is also typically American in that it is conducted by peer volunteers. Every aspect of the process, from setting standards to institutional and program reviews to final accrediting decisions, is carried out by volunteers from colleges and universities, and in the case of program accreditation, often by volunteers from the professions as well.

---

Quality in American higher education is therefore self-regulated, a condition that is highly appreciated and closely guarded by the higher education establishment. With self-regulation comes a responsibility for assuring that the process is sufficiently thorough and rigorous, while at the same time recognizing the extreme diversity of colleges and universities in mission, in size and type, in geographic setting and cultural environment and in the students served.

### **Leadership and Partnership**

College and university presidents, and indeed faculty and other administrators on campuses, sometimes view accreditation as something that is “done to them” because it probes, it scrutinizes and it searches for weaknesses and shortcomings. The results of the process are extremely important to institutions, and there is a certain nervousness that accompanies it on any campus, if only because institutions are proud and never satisfied with anything less than a grade of “A.” All of this is natural and to be expected in any quality assurance process. But American accreditation is more than just quality assurance; it also aims to support institutions in their efforts to improve, and it is successful in doing so if it is engaged with a set of expectations on the part of the institution.

Presidents can exert their leadership in preparing for accreditation if they help faculty and other campus leaders to develop a positive attitude about the process, from the beginning of the self study to the on-site visit and the response to a report. Accreditation should be viewed as a partnership between the institution or program and the accreditor, and any partnership is stronger and more beneficial if each partner understands the needs and desires of the other. It is thus essential that presidents and institutions be prepared to articulate their expectations of the process to accrediting organizations.

### **Topics to be Addressed**

The *Presidential Guidelines Series* will assist presidents and their institutions in gaining the most benefit from the accrediting process, whether institutional or programmatic. The series will include brief, quick-to-digest suggestions on topics such as...

- *Presidential Leadership.* What is expected from the institutional leadership to make the accreditation process most effective? How does a president influence those on campus who will be more directly involved in the process? What is the responsibility of presidents and chancellors in supporting accreditation beyond one’s own institution?
  - *Formulating Expectations.* What do presidents expect from the accreditation process? How can the accreditor help an institution? What are points of emphasis that should not be overlooked? What might be on a president’s agenda that is not on the agenda of the faculty and staff?
  - *The Self Study.* How do presidents approach the self study, assure broad participation and encourage a thorough, honest appraisal that will help the institution or program improve?
  - *The Site Visit.* How do presidents prepare the campus, articulate the institution’s expectations of the accreditation process and show hospitality appropriately?
  - *Following Up After the Visit.* How does the institution respond to factual errors in the report, help take advantage of suggestions and separate suggestions for improvement from requirements for accreditation?
  - *Reporting to a Governing Board and Others, e.g., Legislators, Donors.* How and how much should presidents engage the board in the process and in the follow-up?
  - *Dealing with the Media.* What is to be reported, how and when?
  - *Accrediting Internationally.* What is the relationship of U.S. accreditation to quality assurance of higher education in other nations?
- 