

THE COMMISSION ON QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Paul Shiffman, Chief Executive Officer, The Presidents' Forum

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**James Hall, President Emeritus, State University of New York - Empire State
College, Chancellor Emeritus – Antioch University and Consultant to The Presidents'
Forum**

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The Presidents' Forum

<http://PresidentsForum.org>

- **A collaborative of accredited institutions and organizations.**
- **Focus on online postsecondary education**
- **Participants from all sectors of postsecondary education**
- **Formulates policies and action strategies to drive innovation and best practices in online and distance learning.**

The Politics of Quality Assurance in Distance Learning

- **Quality assurance by framing new objectives for the reauthorization of the higher education act.**
- **Quality assurance through state and federal regulation.**
- **Quality assurance through rankings, ratings, and scorecards.**
- **Assessing the need for quality assurance for non-institutional providers of postsecondary education.**

Recognizing An Expanding Online Postsecondary Education Marketplace

- **Non-Institutional Based**
- **Generally Non-Credit Courses or Programs**
- **Rely on “Free Market” Acceptance vs. Authorization**
- **Public Interest Issues: Consumer Choice, Consumer Protection, Verification of Learning Outcomes, Cost and R.O.I. = Quality Assurance**

THE COMMISSION ON QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- **Explore major changes taking place in higher education through the emergence of alternative providers of educational courses generally not for credit.**
- **Address processes for quality assurance by examining possible changes and how to accomplish.**
- **Recommend actions to strengthen the integrity of quality assurance for alternative sources of postsecondary learning.**
- **Consider the expansion of traditional accreditation, development of standards for non-institutional offerings, and who should undertake these actions.**

Categories of Providers

Category A:

**Chartered, State
Authorized and
Accredited
Universities and
Colleges (Public,
Independent, For-
profit)**

Category B:

**Assessment and
Credit
Recommendation
Service
Organizations**

Category C:

**External, Non-
Institutional
Providers**

Category A:

**Chartered, State Authorized and Accredited Universities and
Colleges (Public, Independent, For-profit)**

Standards and processes in place for academic program quality assurance and fiscal stability.

Hold voluntary accreditation from third-party accreditors that are recognized either by the U.S. Department of Education, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or both.

Longitudinal or other evidence of student performance and success.

Students eligible for Federal Title IV Student Financial Aid.

Category B:

Assessment and Credit Recommendation Service Organizations

Recommend academic credit awards, subject to acceptance and approval by Category A institutions.

Assessment is normally requested by an external, non-institutional provider seeking to confirm academically credible study.

Assessment is at the level of a course, peer reviewed, rather than of the provider as an organization.

Generally adhere to qualitative measurements acceptable to accredited institutions.

No independent third-party oversight.

Category C: External, Non-Institutional Providers

Includes specialized training and skills programs conducted by military, corporate, labor and worker organizations, and others.

Responsive to emerging workforce occupational skill requirements.

Offer not-for-credit studies. Providers may award certificates, badges, workplace promotions, or other forms of employer recognition for completion. Some may seek credit equivalencies.

Common references for verification of qualitative standards are minimal.

No independent third-party formal qualitative assurance for providers, their products, or student performance data.

Some providers may be officially acknowledged by trade or national associations.

Limited public evidence of organizational or financial stability.

Most offerings are aimed at postsecondary learners.

Some providers are long established with longitudinal evidence of student performance and success, while other providers, especially those more recently established, may not have a record of performance.

Utilizes distance and online delivery of instruction.

Questions for Further Exploration

- Would a quality review process for non-institutional providers offer the public, including students, policy makers, and employers, documentation of “credibility” useful to select among providers?
- Would greater cooperation and /or adoption of some form of third-party verification or certification of standards of practice shared among credit assessment service organizations (i.e. ACE, NCCRS, and CAEL) improve wider understanding, acceptance, and utilization of the work of these organizations by colleges and universities?
- Should an external quality review process for non-institutional providers provide a pathway for these providers to participate in federal student financial aid programs?
- Would development of an experimental model provide a way to demonstrate and test such a process?

The Elephant in the Room?

Federal Student Financial Aid

