

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

FACT SHEET #1

OVERVIEW OF ACCREDITATION

September 2001

"Accreditation" is a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. In the U.S., accreditation is carried out by private, nonprofit organizations designed for this specific purpose.

"Recognition" is a process of external quality review of accrediting organizations to affirm their quality and effectiveness. In the U.S., recognition is carried out by a federal agency, the United States Department of Education (USDE), and by a private organization, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

Institutions and educational programs seek accredited status as a means of demonstrating their academic quality to students and the public and to become eligible for federal funds.

NUMBERS OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS

◆ 6,351 institutions are accredited

◆ 17,605 programs are accredited

These institutions and programs are accredited by organizations recognized either by the United States Department of Education (USDE) or by organizations recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or undergoing a CHEA recognition review.*

*CHEA was founded in 1996 and initiated recognition reviews in 1999. Not all accrediting organizations that participate in CHEA have completed the recognition process.

Of the 6,351 institutions:

◆ 4,119 (64.8%) are degree-granting
(associate degree and above)

◆ 3,563 (56.1%) are nonprofit.

◆ 2,232 (35.1%) are non-degree-granting

◆ 2,788 (43.8%) are for-profit

Source: CHEA Internal Review, Summer 2001

5,839 accredited institutions are in the federal Title IV (student aid) Program. 3,884 of these institutions are nonprofit and 1,955 are for-profit. 790 foreign institutions are Title IV-eligible (USDE, Office of Student Financial Aid, 2000).

TYPES AND NUMBERS OF RECOGNIZED ACCREDITORS

Types of Accreditors

- ◆ **Regional:** Regional accreditors operate in eight specific clusters of states (regions) in the U.S. and review entire institutions, 98% or more of which are both degree-granting and nonprofit. There are 2,932 regionally accredited institutions. Almost all institutions are comprehensive.
- ◆ **National:** National accreditors operate throughout the country and review entire institutions, 34.8% of which are degree-granting and 65.1% of which are non-degree-granting. 20.4% are non-profit and 79.5% are for-profit. There are 3,419 nationally accredited institutions. Many are single-purpose institutions focusing on, e.g., education in business and information technology. Some are faith-based.
- ◆ **Specialized:** Specialized accreditors operate throughout the country and review programs and some single-purpose institutions. There are more than of 17,600 of these accredited programs and single-purpose operations.

In 2000-2001:

- ◆ 57 accreditors were recognized by USDE.
- ◆ 59 accreditors were recognized by CHEA or undergoing a CHEA recognition review.
- ◆ 38 of these accreditors are both USDE- and CHEA-recognized or undergoing a CHEA review.

Source: CHEA 2001 Almanac of External Quality Review

PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation serves the following purposes:

- ◆ *Assuring Quality.* Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure academic quality to students and the public.
- ◆ *Access to Federal Funds.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is required in order for students to gain access to federal funds such as student grants and loans and other federal support.
- ◆ *Easing Transfer.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities.
- ◆ *Engendering Employer Confidence.* Accredited status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and providing financial support to current employees seeking additional education.

RECOGNITION PURPOSES AND STANDARDS

USDE and CHEA each review the quality and effectiveness of accrediting organizations:

- ◆ USDE's primary purpose is to assure that federal student aid funds are purchasing quality courses and programs. USDE's recognition is based on ten standards that include attention to e.g., recruitment and admission practices, fiscal and administrative capacity and facilities.
- ◆ CHEA's primary purpose is to assure and strengthen academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in courses, programs and degrees. CHEA's recognition is based on five standards that include e.g., advancing academic quality and encouraging needed improvement.

Please visit the USDE Website at www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/ for additional information about the USDE recognition standards and a list of recognized accreditors. Please visit the CHEA Website at www.chea.org for additional information about the CHEA recognition standards and a list of CHEA accreditors.

ACCREDITATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING

- ◆ Most distance learning currently available is offered by accredited institutions. USDE reported that 1,680 institutions were offering distance learning in 1997-98, all of which were accredited institutions.
- ◆ 17 of the 19 (89.4%) institutional accreditors (regional and national) that are USDE- or CHEA-recognized (or undergoing a CHEA recognition review) are actively engaged in scrutinizing distance learning. This involves the application of accreditation standards, guidelines or policies to distance learning courses, programs and degrees to determine academic quality. Where appropriate, accreditors have modified and expanded their practices to address unique features of distance learning (e.g., examination of computer mediated instruction may vary from examination of classroom-based instruction).
- ◆ Both USDE and CHEA review the distance learning activities of these accreditors:
 - ◆ Based on the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, current USDE recognition standards are applied to accreditors' standards, policy and guidelines for all types of educational delivery, including distance learning.
 - ◆ CHEA recognition standards are applied to accreditors' standards, policy and guidelines for all types of educational delivery, including distance learning.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a nationally based, private, nonprofit organization that coordinates national, regional and specialized accreditation and represents 3,000 degree-granting accredited institutions and 59 accrediting organizations (2000-2001). CHEA's primary responsibilities are advocacy for self-regulation of higher education through voluntary accreditation, scrutiny ("recognition") of accrediting organizations and articulation and presentation of key accreditation issues and challenges to higher education, government and the public.

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