

Council for
Higher Education
Accreditation

One Dupont Circle NW • Suite 510
Washington DC 20036-1135

tel: 202-955-6126
fax: 202-955-6129

e-mail: chea@chea.org
web: www.chea.org

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Gloria Blue, Executive Secretary
Trade and Policy Staff Committee
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
1724 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Colleagues:

In response to the March 19, 2002 Federal Register request for comment on the current multilateral trade negotiations in relation to specific country restrictions on education and training services, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) offers the following.

CHEA is a United States national, private, nonprofit membership organization of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and 60 institutional and programmatic accreditors. It is the sole coordinating organization for accreditation, quality assurance and quality improvement of higher education in the U.S.

As CHEA has previously advised USTR, our members are not facing any significant obstacles in making their services available outside the U.S.; therefore, we are not requesting USTR to seek any commitments from other WTO Members with respect to education and testing services. CHEA is working hard to develop nation-based, regional and international agreements with countries around the world to build a network of understanding and cooperation of quality review that will enhance student mobility, encourage economic development and, in the case of under-developed countries, strengthen assistance from developed countries. We have made significant progress.

We believe that these strenuous efforts will produce the best of both worlds: higher education that honors the traditions and values of individual societies and, at the same time, sustains powerful cooperative arrangements that provide a solid foundation for quality international higher education.

However, to the extent that USTR seeks or offers commitments in educational and testing services, we respectfully and urgently request that such commitments not be sought or made in any way that would undermine the current discretion of [U.S.] accreditation organizations and quality assurance agencies to determine which institutions and programs will be eligible for a review and the outcome of such reviews.

The continued building and enhancement of higher education and quality review capacity in countries around the world requires that these higher education institutions, accreditation organizations and quality assurance agencies retain their current freedom to determine the institutions and programs that are eligible for quality review consideration and may or may not be deemed "quality" by these entities. This freedom should apply equally to all accreditation organizations and quality assurance agencies without regard to whether they are government-based or private.

CHEA would strongly oppose any WTO commitments that have the potential to interfere with the freedom of U.S. accrediting organizations and quality assurance agencies with respect to these critical organizational purposes.

Sincerely,

Judith S. Eaton
President