



OP-ED



THE FUTURE OF ACCREDITATION: THE CHEA OPINION SERIES

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Things Will Be Better

Bernard Fryshman

(The following is a view of what can happen, over time, in a positive vein for accreditation.)

Legislators, before proposing accreditation-related bills, will join accreditation site visitors in fact-finding missions as participants in a site visit. Not quite the same as a Far East junket, but the coffee served is not too bad.

Higher education experts will also join such site visits. More, they will design and guide experiments involving alternate approaches to assessing quality. The methodology for these experiments will incorporate scientific standards, with hypotheses and answers.

Numbers will no longer do harm, because numbers supplied as evidence will be supported by the kind of human interaction and observation characteristic of peer review.

A member of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity will wonder aloud, "Why are we telling accreditors what to do? Why not place the onus on accrediting organizations to demonstrate they comply with regulations, and tell us how they do so."

This will strike a responsive chord in the Department of Education (USDE) itself. "Maybe," someone will say "government doesn't know best. Maybe people are getting hurt because we're forcing accreditors to require schools to gather data that turns out to be meaningless."

A Ph.D. candidate will research the interaction between USDE and accreditation and conclude that it's based on the need to ensure that students receiving federal student aid are attending quality schools. "Accreditors gather that information at private expense," the scholar will write, "and share it freely with government."

Certain elite colleges, fed up with intrusive regulations coming from Washington, will decide to withdraw from participation in Title IV even while continuing to welcome accreditation.

A wealthy foundation will be subject to a class action suit by students who participated in its well-funded, quick and easy degree initiative. The students, with largely worthless degrees will argue, "Why didn't you warn us" and "Why didn't you require informed consent?" A judge will agree.



Journalists, presented with breathtaking schemes for educating numerous students quickly and cheaply will wait to write their stories after the visionary strategies have been tried for a few years, rather than before.

Finally, accreditors will raise their voices above the din of unfair and unfounded criticism and point to a higher educational system, largely staid and steady, which remains the envy of the world.

We need only hold fast and stay the course.

Bernard Fryshman is Executive Vice President Emeritus and Interim Executive Director of the Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools (AARTS).

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One Dupont Circle, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-955-6126 Fax: 202-955-6129

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