

# ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION IN THE UNITED STATES

---

**Judith S. Eaton, President**

**Council for Higher Education Accreditation, USA**

*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.*



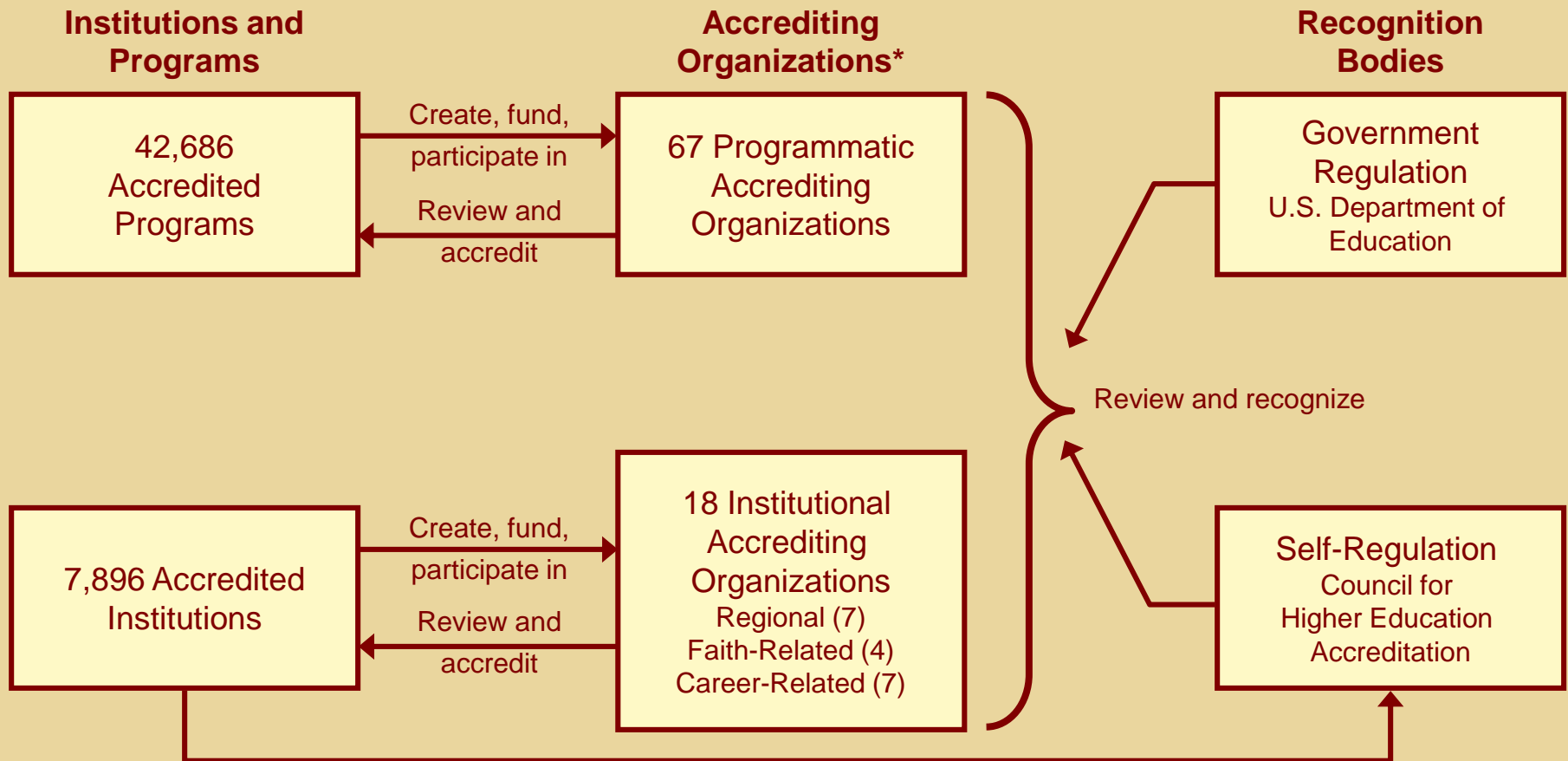
# How Is U.S. Accreditation Defined?

- Accreditation is about both
  - **Quality assurance:** assuring threshold quality in higher education; and
  - **Quality improvement:** assuring that institutions and programs have processes to try to do what they do better.

# Who Is Involved in U.S. Accreditation?

- Higher Education Institutions and Programs
- Accrediting Organizations
- Recognition Bodies
- State Government
- Federal Government
- Students, Families and the Public

# Relationship Among Institutions Accredited by Recognized Accrediting Organizations, Recognized Accrediting Organizations and Recognition Bodies



\*Some accrediting organizations are recognized only by CHEA, some only by USDE, some by both.

# What Are the Core Values of U.S. Accreditation?

- That **higher education institutions** have primary responsibility for academic quality: They are the leaders and the primary sources of authority in academic matters.
- That **institutional mission** is central to all judgments of academic quality.
- That **institutional autonomy** is essential to sustaining and enhancing academic quality.
- That our higher education enterprise—and our society—thrives on **decentralization and diversity** of institutional purpose and mission.
- That **academic freedom** flourishes only in an environment of academic leadership of institutions.

# How Is U.S. Accreditation Organized?

- 85 recognized accrediting organizations in 2012-2013
- Autonomous, private (nongovernmental), nonprofit
- Emerged from higher education, not government
- Legitimacy derives from higher education, not government
- More than 100 years old

# How Is Accreditation Funded?

- Accreditation organizations are funded by:
  - ❑ Annual dues from institutions and programs that are accredited
  - ❑ Fees that institutions and programs pay for accreditation visits
  - ❑ In some instances, financial assistance from sponsoring organizations
- Accrediting organizations sometimes obtain funds for special initiatives from government or from private foundations.

# What Are the Types of Accrediting Organizations?

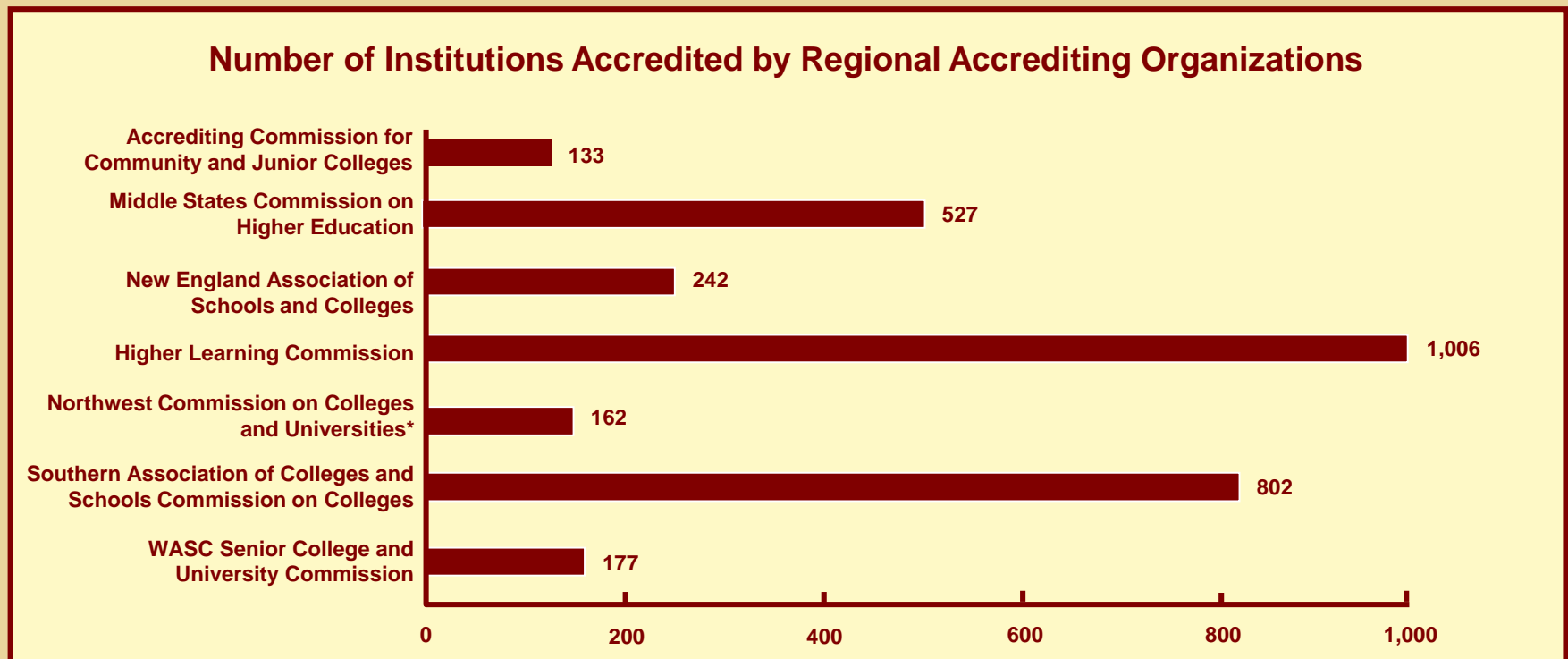
- National Career-Related Accrediting Organizations
- National Faith-Related Accrediting Organizations
- Regional Accrediting Organizations
- Programmatic Accrediting Organizations



# Types of U.S. Accrediting Organizations

## ■ Institutional Accreditors

- **Regional:** Accredited 3,049 public and private, mainly nonprofit and degree-granting, two- and four-year institutions.



\*NWCCU data are for 2008-2009.

# Types of U.S. Accrediting Organizations

## ■ Institutional Accreditors

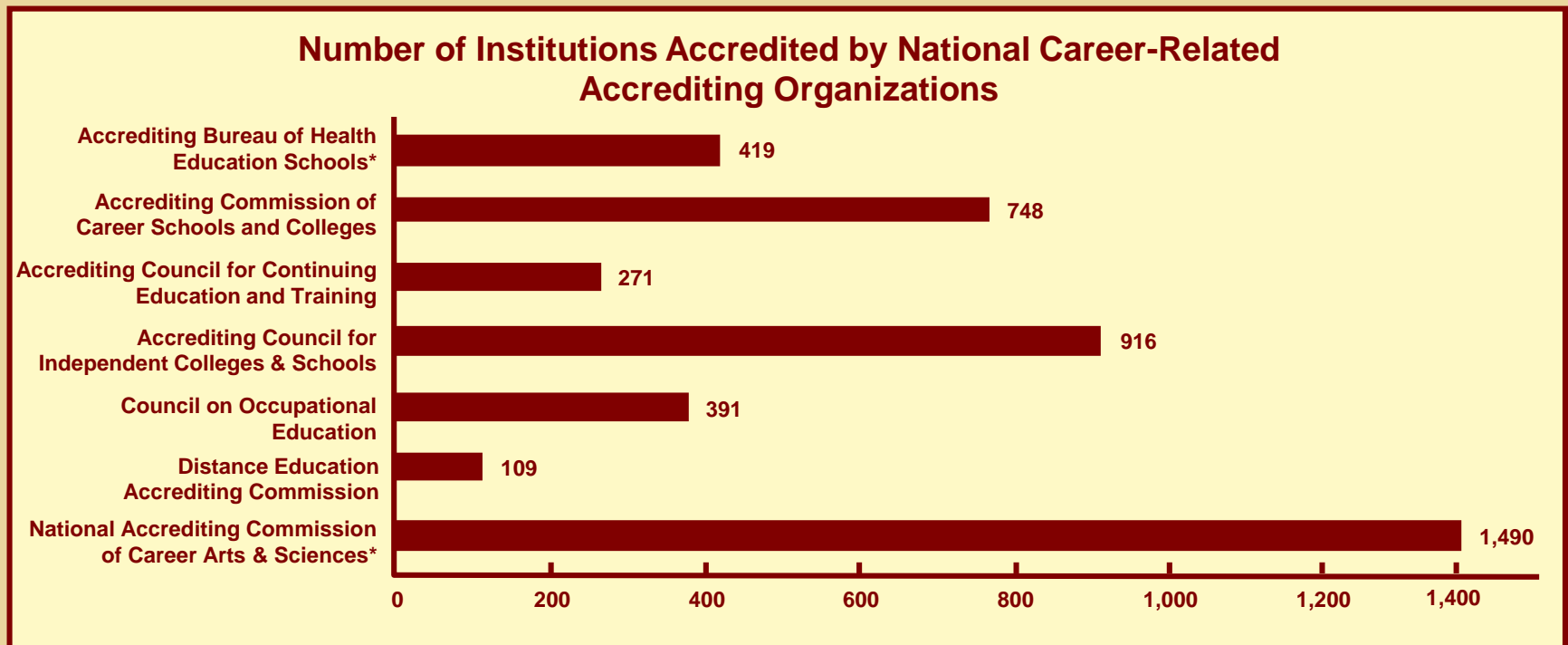
- ❑ **National Faith-Related:** Accredite 503 religiously affiliated or doctrinally based institutions, mainly nonprofit and degree-granting.



# Types of U.S. Accrediting Organizations

## ■ Institutional Accreditors

- **National Career-Related:** Accredite 4,344 mainly for-profit, career-based, single-purpose institutions, including distance learning colleges and universities.



\*ABHES and NACCAS data are for 2010-2011

# Types of U.S. Accrediting Organizations

- **Programmatic Accreditors:** Accredited 42,686\* specific programs, professions or schools, e.g., law, medicine, engineering and health professions. Some schools may be freestanding.

Programmatic Accreditors by Degree or Non-Degree Status*					
	Public	Private Nonprofit	Private For-Profit	Institutional Control Not Indicated	Total
Degree	9,587	5,904	4,522	18,715	38,728
Non-Degree	1,190	532	445	1,791	3,958
Programmatic Total	10,777	6,436	4,967	20,506	42,686

\*This number reflects a very large increase in accredited programs compared to the 2011 *Almanac*. The primary cause of this increase is the change in reporting from several accreditors that reflects counting a program at each location at which it is offered, even if it is the same program. In addition, programmatic accrediting organizations were requested to provide the number of programs they accredited rather than the number of institutions that house the programs.

Thirteen programmatic accreditors did not provide these data for 2012-2013. In these cases, data from 2010-2011 (or in two cases, 2008-2009) were used.

# What Is Accredited?

- Institutions and Programs
- Not Courses or Individuals

## As of 2013:

- More than 7,800 institutions
  - 63 percent are degree-granting (associate degree or above)
  - 37 percent are nondegree
  - 49\* percent are nonprofit
  - 47\* percent are for-profit
- More than 22,000 programs

\*For 271 of the accredited institutions, the institutional control has not been indicated.

# How Does U.S. Accreditation Operate?

- Accrediting organizations develop **standards** that must be met in order to be accredited.
- Institutions and programs undertake **self-studies** based on standards.
- Institutions and programs are subject to **peer review**, including site visits and team reports.
- Accrediting organizations make a **judgment** based on standards through their decision-making commissions and **award** (or do not award) accredited status.
- Institutions and programs undergo **periodic review** by accrediting organizations to maintain accredited status.

*Accreditation is a standards-based, evidence-based, judgment-based, peer-based process.*

# How Does U.S. Accreditation Operate? (Detail)

- **Self-study:** Institutions and programs prepare a written summary of performance based on accrediting organizations' standards.
- **Peer review:** Accreditation review is conducted primarily by faculty and administrative peers in the profession. These colleagues review the self-study and serve on visiting teams that review institutions and programs after the self-study is completed. Peers constitute the majority of members of the accrediting commissions or boards that make judgments about accrediting status.
- **Site visit:** Accrediting organizations normally send a visiting team to review an institution or program. The self-study provides the foundation for the team visit. Teams, in addition to the peers described above, may also include public members (non-academics who have an interest in higher education). All team members are volunteers and are generally not compensated.

# How Does U.S. Accreditation Operate? (Detail, cont.)

- **Judgment by accrediting organization:** Accrediting organizations have decision-making bodies (commissions) made up of administrators and faculty from institutions and programs as well as public members. These commissions may affirm accreditation for new institutions and programs, reaffirm accreditation for ongoing institutions and programs, and deny accreditation to institutions and programs.
- **Periodic external review:** Institutions and programs continue to be reviewed over time on cycles that range from every few years to every 10 years. They normally prepare a self-study and undergo a site visit each time.



# What Role Does Accreditation Play in U.S. Society?

- Assures threshold quality for students and the public.
- Required for access to federal and state funds.
- One basis for private sector (e.g., corporations, individuals and foundations) decisions to support higher education: tuition assistance, charitable giving, research.
- Eases transfer of credit.
- Provides information and confidence with regard to status of U.S. institutions operating in the United States and abroad.

# What Role Does U.S. Accreditation Play? (Detail)

- **Assuring quality.** Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least threshold standards for its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programs provide evidence of fiscal stability.
- **Access to federal and state funds.** Accreditation is required for access to federal funds such as student aid and other federal programs. Federal student aid funds are available to students only if the institution or program they are attending is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization. The United States awarded \$169 billion (US) in student grants and loans in 2010-2011 alone. State funds to institutions and students are contingent on accredited status.

# What Role Does U.S. Accreditation Play?

## (Detail, cont.)

- **Engendering private sector confidence.** Accreditation status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. Individuals and foundations look for evidence of accreditation when making decisions about private giving.
- **Easing transfer.** Accreditation is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges, universities and programs. Receiving institutions take note of whether or not the credits a student wishes to transfer have been earned at an accredited institution. Although accreditation is but one among several factors taken into account by receiving institutions, it is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality.

# What Is Accreditation's Relationship to Government?

## Federal government

- Relies on accreditation to assure quality of institutions and programs.
- Determines eligibility of institutions and programs for federal funds (student grants and loans, other funds) based on accredited status.

## State governments

- Will initially license institutions and programs without accreditation (in most states).
- However, will require accreditation to make state funds available to institutions and students.
- Often require that individuals who sit for state licensure in various professions have graduated from accredited institutions and programs.

*Government Considers Accreditation To Be  
A Reliable Authority On Academic Quality.*

# In Summary . . .

- Accreditation in the United States is about quality assurance and quality improvement.
- It is private (nongovernmental) and nonprofit – an outgrowth of the higher education community and not government.
- It is a process to scrutinize institutions and programs.
- It has a complex relationship with government, especially in relation to funding higher education.
- It adds value to the society through assuring quality, enabling government to make sound judgments about the use of public funds, aiding the private sector in decisions about financial support and easing transfer of credit.

# What Assures the Quality of Accrediting Organizations?

The process of assuring the quality of accreditors is called “**recognition.**”

“**Recognition**” is a review of the quality and effectiveness of accrediting organizations based on a specific set of standards.

# Who Assures the Quality of Accreditation? (Who “Recognizes” U.S. Accreditors?)

## **Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)**

A private (nongovernmental), institutional membership organization that scrutinizes the capacity of accrediting bodies to assure and improve the academic quality of institutions and programs, based on CHEA standards.

## **United States Department of Education (USDE)**

A federal government agency that scrutinizes the capacity of accrediting organizations to assure the soundness of institutions and programs that are eligible for federal funds including student aid, based on federal standards.

# CHEA and USDE Recognition: Purposes

- CHEA's primary purpose is to assure and strengthen academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in institutions and programs.
- USDE's primary purpose is to assure that federal student aid and other federal funds are purchasing quality programs and degrees.
- **CHEA and USDE:**
  - ❑ Undertake parallel but not identical recognition activity;
  - ❑ Maintain ongoing, informal consultation about the recognition of accrediting organizations; and
  - ❑ Sustain a valuable public-private relationship of government regulation and self-regulation.



# Accrediting Organizations Recognized by CHEA or USDE\*

## Accrediting Organizations Recognized by CHEA and USDE

	Regional	National Faith-Related	National Career Related	Programmatic
CHEA-recognized	6	4	2	48
USDE-recognized	7	4	7	34
Total Organizations (80)	7	4	7	67

\*Some accrediting organizations are recognized by both CHEA and USDE.

# How Does Recognition Operate?

- CHEA and USDE develop **standards** that must be met by accrediting organizations in order to be recognized.
- Accrediting organization undertakes **self-evaluation** based on recognition standards.
- CHEA or USDE may require a **staff site visit** and **staff report**.
- CHEA and USDE **award** (or do not award) recognition status.
- Accrediting organization undergoes **periodic review** to maintain recognition.

# How Is Recognition Funded?

- CHEA funds its recognition activity through annual fees charged to its institutional members.
- The federal government funds its recognition activity through a budget allocation from Congress to USDE.

# CHEA (Nongovernmental) Recognition Standards\*

- **Advance academic quality.** Accreditors have a clear description of academic quality and clear expectations that the institutions or programs they accredit have processes to determine whether quality standards are being met.
- **Demonstrate accountability.** Accreditors have standards that call for institutions and programs to provide consistent, reliable information about academic quality and student achievement to foster continuing public confidence and investment.
- **Encourage, where appropriate, self-scrutiny and planning for change and needed improvement.** Accreditors encourage self-scrutiny for change and needed improvement through ongoing self-examination in institutions and programs.

\*As of June 2010. This language illustrates the recognition standards and is not the full or official CHEA policy statement.

# CHEA (Nongovernmental) Recognition Standards\* (cont.)

- **Employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision making.**  
Accreditors maintain appropriate and fair organizational policies and procedures that include effective checks and balances.
- **Demonstrate ongoing review of accreditation practice.**  
Accreditors undertake self-scrutiny of their accrediting activities.
- **Possess sufficient resources.** Accreditors have and maintain predictable and stable resources.

\*As of June 2010. This language illustrates the recognition standards and is not the full or official CHEA policy statement.

# Federal (Governmental) Recognition Standards\*

**The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:**

- Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions and programs as established by the institution, including as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination and job placement rates.
- Curricula.
- Faculty.
- Facilities, equipment and supplies.
- Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations.
- Student support services.
- Recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading and advertising.

\*As of July 2010.

# Federal (Governmental) Recognition Standards\* (cont.)

- Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered.
- Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency.
- Record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency.

\*As of July 2010.

# In Summary . . .

- Recognition in the United States is about scrutiny of the quality and effectiveness of accrediting organizations.
- It is carried out by the higher education enterprise through CHEA, a private body, and by government (USDE).
- The goals of the two recognition processes are different:
  - CHEA: Assuring that accrediting organizations contribute to maintaining and improving academic quality
  - USDE: Assuring that accrediting organizations contribute to maintaining the soundness of institutions and programs that receive federal funds.
- The two recognition processes are similar: self-evaluation based on standards, site visit and report, award of recognition status.
- Recognition adds value to the society as a vital part of accreditation accountability or “accrediting the accreditors.”



# THANK YOU

## Council for Higher Education Accreditation

One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20036-1135  
p. 202-955-6126  
f. 202-955-6129  
[www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)  
[chea@chea.org](mailto:chea@chea.org)