

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

A Reauthorization Agenda for Accreditation and Accountability Reform

May 2003

An Agenda for the Congressional Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

INTRODUCTION

THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA) REAUTHORIZATION AGENDA places primary emphasis on accountability reform in accreditation. The six goals of the agenda call on accrediting organizations, institutions, and programs to strengthen and expand the commitment to accountability in accreditation as key to meeting the changing needs of higher education and society.

Accountability reform must take place in a context of continued commitment to self-regulation through accreditation as the central means of assuring the independence and academic quality of higher education. Advocacy for a strong system of accreditation is also advocacy for the current mission-based, decentralized structure of higher education with its core commitments to institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

The CHEA Reauthorization Agenda builds on the current strengths of accreditation:

- Accreditation *provides value* by routinely affirming and working to improve the academic quality of higher education.
- Accreditation *has historically been accountable* to students, families, government, and the public as part of a range of accountability initiatives used by higher education institutions, faculty, and governing boards.
- Accreditation *is responsive* to significant changes in higher education, such as distance learning and international education.

GOALS FOR ACCREDITATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY REFORM

CHEA's reauthorization goals address accreditation and accountability in relation to student learning outcomes and institutional performance, information to the public, distance learning, transfer of credit, and key principles of accreditation. The goals also include proposed legislation for accreditation and accountability reform.

- Goal 1.** Expand development and use of evidence of student learning outcomes as well as evidence of institution and program performance in accreditation review in order that this evidence play an increasingly influential role in judgments about academic quality and accredited status.
- Goal 2.** Expand information to the public about the findings of accreditation review as this information is developed by accrediting organizations, institutions, and programs.

- Goal 3.** Assure quality in distance learning by calling for appropriate quality review of any distance learning providers or offerings that are newly eligible for Title IV (Student Assistance) funds.
- Goal 4.** Take additional steps to strengthen transfer of credit to meet student access and mobility needs in those instances in which accredited status may be problematic as transfer decisions are made by institutions and programs.
- Goal 5.** Advocate accountability reform in accreditation in the context of four principles on which accreditation operates:
- Accreditation is committed to the *efficacy of a national decentralized, mission-based approach* to higher education as well as to accreditation.
 - Accreditation *is a private self-regulatory undertaking* and not a state actor or arm of the government.
 - Accreditation has *primary responsibility for judgments about academic quality in higher education.*
 - Accreditation is responsible for *judgments about the general fiscal and administrative soundness of institutions and programs*, but not for their compliance with Title IV (Student Assistance) of the Higher Education Act (HEA).
- Goal 6.** Present proposed legislation (*The Academic Quality and Higher Education Accountability Reform Act of 2003*) for accountability reform in accreditation and commitment to the value of accreditation to assure academic quality.*

*Under development

THE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA) is a nationally based, nonprofit organization that coordinates institutional and programmatic accreditation and represents degree-granting institutions and accrediting organizations. 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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