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## ABSTRACT

This document consists of five fact sheets from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The first fact sheet, "Overview of Accreditation," provides information on the numbers of accredited institutions of higher learning in the United States and the types and numbers of accrediting organizations. The fact sheet also discusses the purposes of accreditation and the accreditation of distance education programs. The second fact sheet, "The Role of Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Electronically Delivered Distance Learning," provides a brief description of the role of accreditation in ensuring quality as distance education opportunities expand and diversify. Fact Sheet # 3 contains "Twelve Important Questions about External Quality Review." These are questions that students and others might find useful to ask about the external quality review of a course, institution, or program in which they might enroll. The fourth sheet, "A Framework for Meeting Transfer of Credit Responsibilities," describes the responsibilities to students and the public that accrediting organizations and institutions are asked to consider when addressing transfer of credit requests and academic quality. The final sheet, "Accrediting Organizations in the U.S.: How Do They Operate to Assure Quality?" provides a brief overview of how U.S. accrediting organizations carry out their work: information about standards and policies of individual accrediting organizations, governance and organization of accreditors, and how to find information about accredited institutions and programs. (SLD)

## Council for Higher Education Accreditation Fact Sheets #1-5

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# **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.  
◆ 2,788 (43.8%) are for-profit

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

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 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

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## 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/](http://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](http://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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# **COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION**

## **FACT SHEET #2**

### **THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION AND ASSURING QUALITY IN ELECTRONICALLY DELIVERED DISTANCE LEARNING**

September 2001

*Institutional (national and regional) and programmatic (specialized) accreditors have been reviewing distance-based higher education since the establishment of correspondence schools more than 100 years ago. With the advent of the World Wide Web and Internet-based distance learning, accreditors are now actively engaged in refining and applying their quality review practices to meet the needs of electronically delivered courses, programs and degrees. Fact Sheet #2 provides a brief description of the role of accreditation to assure quality as distance learning opportunities expand and diversify.*

#### **WHO OFFERS ELECTRONICALLY DELIVERED DISTANCE LEARNING?**

- The United States Department of Education (USDE) reports that 1,680 institutions were offering distance learning in 1997-98. These institutions are accredited and enrolled 1.6 million distance learning students in 1997-98.<sup>1</sup>

#### **HOW IS DISTANCE LEARNING REVIEWED FOR QUALITY?**

- Accreditation (external peer review of institutions and programs to assure and improve quality) is the primary means by which higher education distance learning offerings are currently reviewed for quality. Accreditors are responsible for scrutiny of distance learning for all higher education institutions and programs they review that offer education through distance.
- 17 of the 19 (89.4%) "recognized" institutional accreditors (regional and national) are actively engaged in scrutinizing distance learning – applying accreditation standards, guidelines or policies to distance learning offerings and degrees to determine academic quality.<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate, accreditors have modified and expanded their practices to address unique features of distance learning.
- Accreditors do not employ identical review practices to assure quality in distance learning. Standards, policies and guidelines vary by the type of accreditor and the type of institution or program that is reviewed.

#### **Regional Accreditation**

The eight regional accrediting commissions are adopting a common platform for review of distance learning.<sup>3</sup> This platform calls for scrutiny of teaching and learning, curriculum, student services, faculty and evaluation practices. The *Statement* and *Best Practices* affect approximately 3,000 colleges and universities:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Higher Education ([www.msache.org](http://www.msache.org))
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education ([www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org))
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Technical and Career Institutions ([www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org))

<sup>1</sup> Distance Education at Postsecondary Education Institutions 1997-98, United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Report, NCES 2000-013, December 1999. Most recent data available.

<sup>2</sup> "Recognition" is a status achieved by accrediting organizations that have undergone a review of their quality and met the standards of either the USDE or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a private organization that coordinates regional, national and specialized accreditation.

<sup>3</sup> Statement of Commitment by the Regional Accrediting Commissions for the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs and Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs, 2001). Available from the Websites of the regional accreditors.

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- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, The Higher Learning Commission ([www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org](http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org))
- Northwest Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities; Commission on Colleges and Universities ([www.cocnasc.org](http://www.cocnasc.org))
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org))
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges ([www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org))
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities ([www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org))

#### **National Accreditation**

The nine national accreditors have independently developed standards for distance learning. These standards are often accompanied by additional requirements from the accreditors such as special reports, expanded attention to student learning outcomes and special site visits. These standards affect more than 2,400 institutions:

- One accreditor has developed *new* standards: Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology ([www.accsct.org](http://www.accsct.org))
- One accreditor reviews *only* distance learning operations: Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council ([www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org))
- One accreditor has developed *supplemental* standards: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools ([www.acics.org](http://www.acics.org))
- Two accreditors have standards that specifically address extension offerings, alternative sites and delivery systems *including distance learning*: Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, Commission on Accreditation ([www.aabc.org](http://www.aabc.org)) and Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Commission on Accrediting ([www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu))
- One accreditor has standards specifically for *interactive distance learning*: Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training ([www.accet.org](http://www.accet.org))
- Three accreditors are using the *same* standards for review of distance learning that are used for site-based education: Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools ([www.abhes.org](http://www.abhes.org)), Council on Occupational Education ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)), Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission ([www.tracs.org](http://www.tracs.org))

#### **HOW ARE ACCREDITING ORGANIZATIONS HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR REVIEW OF QUALITY OF DISTANCE LEARNING?**

- Both CHEA and USDE undertake recognition reviews of accreditors, including their distance learning activities, on a periodic basis. In addition, accreditors that develop new standards or policies for distance learning may undergo a special review.
- CHEA recognition standards are applied to accreditors' standards, policy and guidelines for all types of educational delivery, including distance learning. These standards include attention to advancing academic quality, demonstrating accountability and encouraging needed quality improvement.
- USDE recognition standards are applied to accreditors' standards, policy and guidelines for all types of educational delivery, including distance learning. These standards include attention to recruitment and admission practices, fiscal and administrative capacity and facilities.

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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# **COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION**

## **FACT SHEET #3**

### **TWELVE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW**

*September 2001*

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*The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is interested in assisting individuals who wish to pursue higher education in the United States. To this end we have prepared a series of questions that students and others may find useful to ask about the external quality review of a course, institution or program in which they might enroll.*

*While CHEA considers external quality review to be an important and constructive process for higher education institutions, external quality review may be only one among many considerations relevant to an individual's choice of a course of study, program, or institution. CHEA does not endorse any specific course of study, program or institution, but encourages careful scrutiny of materials, commitments and claims of all providers of higher education.*

***If you are considering enrolling in a course of study or program at a higher education institution, you may find it useful to inquire about the external quality review of the course, program, or institution.***

1. Is the course, program or institution accredited?
2. What are the standards of quality? Is there an available summary of the last review?
3. If the course, program, or institution is not accredited, is it certified for quality by another organization?
4. What external quality review is performed by this other organization and what are the standards? Is there a summary of the last review?
5. How can the organization that accredits or provides other types of external quality reviews be contacted?

***You may address these and similar questions to:***

- The institution or provider under consideration for enrollment
- Certifying organization, if necessary

***If you are considering enrolling in an initial course of study or program at one institution and may want to enroll in a further course of study or program at another higher education institution in the future, you may find it useful to inquire about transferability of credits and courses.***

6. Will other institutions accept the credits and courses earned?
7. Will other institutions count the credits and courses toward a degree?
8. Will graduate schools accept the credits and courses for admission?
9. Who decides toward what the credits or courses count? How can they be contacted?

***You may address these and similar questions to:***

- The institution or provider under consideration for enrollment
- The institution or provider under consideration for transfer

***If you intend to use a course of study or program for employment purposes or would like your employer to provide tuition assistance, you may find it useful to inquire about acceptance of credits and courses by employers.***

10. Will employers accept the credits and courses earned?
11. Will employers acknowledge the credits and courses for upgrading, retraining and additional compensation?
12. Who should be contacted to learn what courses and credits an employer may accept?

***You may address these and similar questions to:***

- The employer or likely future employer

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*For additional information concerning external quality review, you can contact or consult::*

**Print Sources:**

***Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education***

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E-mail: [info@hepinc.com](mailto:info@hepinc.com)  
Internet: [www.hepinc.com](http://www.hepinc.com)

***The National Guide to Educational Credit for  
Training Programs***

American Council on Education  
Edited by Jo Ann Robinson & Jacqueline E. Taylor  
ACE/CREDIT  
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 250  
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Phone: (202) 939-9300  
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Fax: (202) 219-7005  
Internet: [www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation)

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# Council For Higher Education Accreditation

## FACT SHEET #4

### ***A Framework for Meeting Transfer of Credit Responsibilities***

May 2002

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**T**HE COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA) initiated its work on accreditation and transfer of credit in 1998. In 2000, CHEA published *A Statement to the Community: Transfer and the Public Interest*. This statement was the result of CHEA's concern that accredited status of a program or institution assist, not hinder, students in the transfer process.\*

CHEA's work on accreditation and transfer is based on three important considerations:

- *Accredited* status of an institution is an important, but not the sole factor, to consider in transfer of credit decisions.
- *Considering* transfer requests serves students and the public. The public interest and students are best served when institutions commit to at least consideration of transfer requests, not rejecting such requests out of hand.
- *Accepting* transfer credits is the responsibility and prerogative of institutions.

The CHEA *Statement* offered four criteria that accrediting organizations and institutions are asked to consider as decisions are made about transfer of credit and academic quality. These criteria are:

- Balance in the use of accreditation status in transfer decisions: Institutions and accreditors need to assure that transfer decisions are not made solely on the source of accreditation of a sending program or institution.
- Consistency: Institutions and accreditors need to reaffirm that the considerations that inform transfer decisions are applied consistently.
- Accountability for effective public communication: Institutions and accreditors need to assure that students and the public are fully and accurately informed about their respective transfer policies and practices.
- Commitment to address innovation: Institutions and accreditors need to be flexible and open in considering alternative approaches to managing transfer when these approaches will benefit students (CHEA *Statement*, p. 3).

Following its work on the *Statement*, in 2001, CHEA and the 19 recognized institutional accrediting organizations met to identify key responsibilities that accrediting organizations and institutions are asked to consider if the CHEA *Statement* is to be used effectively.\*\*

The Transfer Framework is the result of this effort and describes the responsibilities to students and the public that accrediting organizations and institutions are asked to consider when addressing transfer of credit requests and academic quality. Meeting these responsibilities can result in accrediting organizations and institutions working together to further strengthen accreditation as a force for good in the transfer of credit process.

For accrediting organizations and institutions that have already addressed these responsibilities, the Framework serves as an important reminder that transfer is an issue that continues to require careful attention. For other accrediting organizations and institutions that have yet to address transfer, the Framework can serve as a basis for the development of sound transfer policy and practice.

The Transfer Framework is offered as an advisory document for accrediting organizations and institutions. CHEA and the accrediting organizations believe that efforts to strengthen transfer would be most successful if approached in a collegial manner; the Framework does not constitute an accreditation or recognition standard.

\*The CHEA *Statement to the Community: Transfer and the Public Interest* is available on the CHEA Website at [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org).

\*\*"Recognized" accrediting organizations are those bodies that have been reviewed and meet the standards for recognition of either CHEA or the United States Department of Education (USDE). For additional information about CHEA or USDE standards, please visit their Websites at [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org) and [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).

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## **TRANSFER OF CREDIT AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO STUDENTS AND THE PUBLIC**

Each of the four criteria in the CHEA *Statement* can be met through accrediting organizations and institutions attending to key responsibilities to students and the public when addressing transfer of credit:

- *Attention to Accrediting Organization and Institutional Transfer Policy and Procedure*
- *Development of Accurate and Timely Information for Students and the Public about Transfer of Credit*
- *Ongoing Communication with Students and the Public about Transfer of Credit*
- *Attention to Improvement of Transfer Practices Through Technology*

### **Attention to Accrediting Organization and Institutional Transfer Policy and Procedure**

The first CHEA *Statement* criterion, balance in the use of accredited status in making transfer decisions, is advanced by a sound policy foundation:

- Developing and maintaining clearly stated policies and procedures for consideration of transfer of credit.
- Assuring organizational and institutional accountability for following established policies and procedures.
- Providing sound mechanisms for ongoing review and updating of policies and procedures.

### **Development of Accurate and Timely Information for Students and the Public about Transfer of Credit**

The second CHEA *Statement* criterion, consistency in the considerations used to evaluate transfer requests, is advanced by accurate information about transfer that is readily available:

- Providing current and reliable information about transfer of credit policies and procedures in a routine manner.
- Distinguishing the information obligations of institutions to students and the public when they function as *sending* institutions (institutions from which students wish to move) from when they function as *receiving* institutions (institutions to which students wish to move).
- Identifying to students and the public the essential academic factors that are involved in transfer of credit decisions, e.g., existing course equivalencies; articulation agreements that recognize experience and credits in a range of areas as well as course equivalencies; grades; comparability; course level, content, and applicability toward a degree or major; and course or program prerequisites.
- Identifying to students and the public the specific steps that must be taken when attempting transfer of credit, e.g., meeting deadlines for consideration of transfer requests, identifying material to be sent to receiving institutions, and obtaining needed assistance from a sending or receiving institution.

### **Ongoing Communication with Students and the Public about Transfer of Credit**

The third CHEA *Statement* criterion, accountability for effective public communication, is advanced through careful attention to the means and scope of communication:

- Maintaining ongoing exchange with students and the public about transfer of credit opportunities and limitations through, e.g., catalogs, counseling and advising, student chatrooms, and Websites.
- Sustaining ongoing contact and information exchange among institutions that routinely send and receive transfer students.
- Providing information to students and the public about special circumstances that may affect the ease or difficulty of course, program, or degree transfer of credit.

### **Attention to Improvement of Transfer Practices Through Technology**

The fourth CHEA *Statement* criterion, to address innovation in managing transfer, is advanced through the capture of the benefits of electronic technology in the service of smooth transfer of credit practices:

- Providing, where feasible, access to software programs that offer customized transfer information to students and making these programs readily available online.
- Expanding the use of accrediting organization Websites to provide information about accreditation transfer policies and procedures.
- Expanding the use of institutional Websites to provide transfer information, e.g., software programs that provide tracking data and other information to students, advisors, and counselors.
- Introducing, where feasible, electronic applications for transcript analysis and other key functions that must be carried out to make transfer of credit decisions.

Student mobility and opportunity in higher education rely in part on successful transfer of credit. Recognized accrediting organizations and CHEA are committed to the enhancement of both mobility and opportunity through transfer of credit.

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# Council For Higher Education Accreditation

## FACT SHEET #5

### ***Accrediting Organizations in the U.S.: How Do They Operate to Assure Quality?***

December 2002

**A**CCREDITATION IS THE PRIMARY MEANS BY WHICH THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS IS ASSURED in the United States. Accreditation is a form of self-regulation in which colleges, universities, and programs have come together to develop standards, policies, and procedures for self-examination and judgment by peers. In 2001, approximately 6300 institutions and 17,500 programs held accredited status.

Accreditation is carried out through private, nonprofit organizations. Some review entire institutions (regional and national accreditors) and others review programs such as law, medicine, or business (specialized accreditors). These organizations undertake this responsibility in quite similar ways, each requiring a self-study by the institution or program under review, a review by peers (including a site visit in most cases), and a judgment about accredited status. These judgments are based on standards of quality developed by the accrediting organization in consultation with the higher education community.

Approximately eighty accrediting organizations in the U.S. are themselves reviewed for quality. They routinely undergo scrutiny (a process called "recognition") either by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or by the federal government through the United States Department of Education (USDE) or both. A complete list of CHEA- and USDE-recognized accrediting organizations may be found on the CHEA Website at [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org) under "Institutional Database."

Accrediting organizations make information available to the public primarily through print documents and Websites. In addition to these documents and Websites, lists of accrediting organizations may be found on the CHEA Website, USDE Website at [www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/), and the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) Website at [www.aspa-usa.org](http://www.aspa-usa.org).

The locations indicated above and the Websites of individual accrediting organizations provide answers to four important questions:

- What institutions and programs are accredited?
- What are the standards and policies used by these organizations to make judgments about the quality of an institution or program?
- What additional information about institutions, programs, or accrediting organizations is available?
- How are accrediting organizations structured, financed, staffed, and governed?

#### **What Institutions and Programs Are Accredited?**

Accrediting organizations routinely answer this question by:

- Maintaining an updated list of the institutions and programs that are accredited;
- Describing the length of time of an accreditation of an institution or program;
- Providing information about whether an accredited institution or program is under any sanctions and a description of these sanctions;
- Maintaining a summary of recent actions taken by accrediting organizations, usually provided after meetings of decision-making bodies; and
- For some organizations, offering aggregate data or profiles of the institutions or programs that are accredited.

#### **What Are the Standards and Policies Used by these Organizations to Make Judgments about Quality?**

The requirements for accreditation may be found in the standards and policies of accrediting organizations.

##### *Standards*

- While each accrediting organization establishes its own standards by which institutions and programs are accredited, these standards all address similar areas, such as expected student achievement, curriculum, faculty, services and academic support for students, and financial capacity.

- Standards are developed or changed through a process of public consultation involving, e.g., faculty, administrators, students, practitioners in specific fields, governing boards, and members of the public. This process often involves an invitation to the public through, e.g., newspapers or general mailings.

#### *Policies*

- Each accrediting organization lays out a framework of expectations and practices that govern the conduct of accreditation review. These policies may include areas such as conflict of interest and release of information.
- Accrediting organizations also provide opportunities to express disagreement with or concern about their decisions or the actions of the institutions or programs they accredit. Examples include:
  - *Appeals*: Accrediting organizations have mechanisms by which an institution or program that is dissatisfied with a review may express its dissatisfaction and seek redress;
  - *Complaints*: Accrediting organizations describe the terms and conditions under which a complaint can be lodged against an institution or program that is accredited.
- Policies are developed or changed through a process of public consultation similar to that which is used for development or changes in standards (above).

#### **What Additional Information Do Accrediting Organizations Make Available?**

- Under certain circumstances, and with permission from institutions or programs, self-study reports and team visit reports offering description and analysis of institutions and programs that are reviewed;
- Dates of upcoming accreditation visits;
- Members of an organization's accrediting decision making body;
- Staff members of accrediting organizations;
- Finances of accrediting organizations;
- Peer evaluators: the volunteers who work with the accrediting organization and carry out accreditation review.

#### **How Do Accrediting Organizations Operate?**

- *Governance and Organization*. Accrediting organizations are private, nonprofit bodies legally incorporated to carry out accreditation activity, or they are subsidiaries of other private, nonprofit organizations. Each accrediting organization has bylaws or a constitution that describes the legal framework for its operation.
- *Staffing*. Full- and part-time paid staff members are employed by the organization to carry out day-to-day activities, including coordination of accreditation reviews, meetings, conferences, and publications.
- *Accreditation Review*.
  - *Self-study*. Institutions or programs seeking accreditation typically prepare a self-study—an examination of whether their operation meets the standards of the accrediting organization.
  - *Team Visit and Report*. Higher education faculty and administrators, practitioners in specific fields, and members of the public make up "teams" that visit an institution or program to determine whether or not the standards of the accrediting organization are being met.
- *Accreditation Decision-Making and Governance*. Higher education faculty and administrators, practitioners in specific fields, and members of the public are elected or appointed to commissions to work together to determine which institutions and programs are to be accredited and under what conditions. This commission may also function as the governing body for the organization under the bylaws or constitution mentioned above.
- *Funding*. The accrediting organization receives its funding from annual dues of its members, support from sponsoring associations, fees paid by institutions or programs for an accreditation visit, conferences and meetings, and, in some instances, grants from external sources.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is a nationally based, private, nonprofit organization that coordinates national, regional, and specialized accreditation and represents degree-granting accredited 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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