

THE COUNCIL FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION
ACCREDITATION



A PROPOSAL RECOMMENDED
BY THE PRESIDENTS WORK
GROUP ON ACCREDITATION

MARCH 1996

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**A Recommendation of the
Presidents Work Group on Accreditation**

I. PREAMBLE

In its rich diversity of public and private colleges and universities with distinctive missions, American higher education is unique. Colleges and universities are free to define their goals, structures, and internal systems of governance. This independence is supported and complemented by a system of self-regulation through regional and specialized accreditation that is independent of government control.

Accreditation serves colleges and universities, the professions, and the public by helping to establish and monitor standards of educational quality. It depends on volunteerism and peer review and respects the autonomy of each college and university. Accreditation provides a mark of acceptance to other educational institutions, corporations, foundations, donors, and research sponsors. Federal and state governments may accept accreditation in lieu of their own oversight and review.

Just as there is a need for both accreditors and the public to be assured of the quality of our colleges and universities, there also is a need for assurance of the integrity and worthiness of higher education accrediting bodies. It is crucial that there be a process of recognition of legitimate accreditors. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation will meet this need. Moreover, there is a need to foster and develop a cooperative climate in which colleges and universities together with accreditors can adapt the accrediting enterprise to today's rapidly changing academic environment. There is a need for better coordination of accrediting activities, for a forum in which to exchange ideas about improving the accreditation process, and for an effective way to mediate disputes among accreditors and institutions. Educators and the public must understand the role of academic self-regulation through peer review and accreditation. Accreditation, if it is to function as it should, must have a national presence, not only for advocacy of the principles of accreditation, but also as a clearinghouse of information about accreditation and accreditors.

Some argue that the U.S. Department of Education can fulfill this role. The Presidents Work Group on Accreditation believes this approach is unsatisfactory for the following reasons:

- Accreditation involves a judgment of quality. Such judgments should be made primarily by the academic community, not by government.
- The Department of Education recognizes agencies that accredit all kinds of postsecondary programs and is not restricted to higher education.
- The Department recognizes only those professional and specialized accrediting agencies that are gatekeepers for eligibility for federal funds.
- The Department's Advisory Committee on Accreditation is just that an advisory committee. The Secretary of Education may disregard its recommendations, thus subjecting the process to potential political interference and political agendas.

The Presidents Work Group on Accreditation seeks to strengthen our self-regulated system of accreditation. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation will not accredit institutions or programs or set accreditation standards, but it will develop and apply criteria, policies, and procedures for recognizing and certifying the accrediting bodies that perform the crucial accreditation function. In effect, the Council will accredit the accreditors. It also will facilitate activities of accreditors of degree-awarding colleges and universities and accreditors of professional programs that produce degrees.

The former Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), an umbrella organization for accreditation, tried to meet many of these needs until it dissolved itself in 1993. As an interim, stop-gap measure, the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) was created to continue only the **recognition** function. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), if approved, will assume the recognition, advocacy, coordination, professional development, publication, and public information functions previously conducted by COPA and CORPA, as well as additional essential functions as outlined herein. The Presidents Work Group on Accreditation, and subsequently the Council's Board of Directors, will work to effect an orderly transition of the recognition process from CORPA to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

II. MISSION

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation will serve students and their families, colleges and universities, sponsoring bodies, governments, and employers by promoting academic quality through formal recognition of higher education accrediting bodies and will coordinate and work to advance self-regulation through accreditation.

III. FUNCTIONS

The Council will serve higher education by performing the following functions:

- recognize sound and effective higher education accrediting bodies;
- coordinate research, debate, and processes that improve accreditation;
- serve as a national advocate for voluntary self-regulation through accreditation;
- collect and disseminate data and information about accreditation;
- mediate disputes and foster communication between and among accrediting bodies and the higher education community; and
- work to preserve the quality and diversity of colleges and universities.

The Council will recognize and work on behalf of specialized as well as regional or institutional accreditation. In both areas, substantial contributions have been made to the academic quality and vitality of American higher education. There also is a general recognition among accreditors and higher education institutions of the need to look for new approaches and better ways of conducting accreditation. Regional accreditors, for example, are working toward the development of a set of common baseline standards against which academic quality can be measured. Specialized accreditors have proposed the adoption of a "Code of Good Practices." There are widely shared concerns about the continuing proliferation of specialized accrediting bodies, the lack of satisfactory communication and conflict resolution, and the need for better coordination among regional and specialized accrediting bodies. There is a general desire that standards for the assessment of academic quality be applied as efficiently, fairly, and consistently as possible, but that this application be made sensitively, with integrity, and in the absence of any rigid, mindless uniformity. Such issues will be central to the work of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Council will include all degree-granting colleges and universities that pay the fee for membership in the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and are accredited by a body recognized by the Council. Initial membership will include those that were accredited by an accrediting body (51 percent of whose accredited institutions award degrees) recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation at the time of its dissolution on December 31, 1993, or subsequently by the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) as of December 31, 1995.

V. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Responsibilities

The Board of Directors will provide leadership to and govern the work of the Council. It will establish policies and employ and oversee the staff required to manage the organization's affairs. The Board will be elected by and accountable to member institutions of higher education. It will involve the higher education community in the conduct of a comprehensive review of the Council and its activities every five years.

Number and Qualifications

The Board will consist of 15 members. Nine members of the Board will be current chief executive officers of degree-granting colleges and universities representative of associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions. Six members will be current or former trustees, faculty members, academic administrators, or members of the public at large. At least three of the six shall not be employees of higher education institutions.

Eight members of the Board will be elected to represent institutions as follows:

- two from associate degree (two-year) colleges;
- two from baccalaureate colleges;
- two from master's (comprehensive) universities and colleges;
- two from research or doctoral universities.

Efforts will be made to achieve a reasonable balance in the overall composition of the Board with regard to public and private institutions, geography, professional and disciplinary field, institutional character and mission, and gender, race, and ethnicity of Board members.

Selection

Nominations for the initial Board of the Council were solicited from colleges and universities, institutional associations, and accrediting bodies. The Presidents Work Group on Accreditation hereby recommends a slate of candidates. The ballot also allows for write-in candidates. The election of each Board member will be by a majority of votes cast. Should the proposal for the creation of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation fail to be approved by a majority of those institutions voting, the election of members of the Board of Directors will be null and void.

Terms of Office

Board members will serve staggered, three-year terms. The first Board will be elected to serve one-, two-, or three-year terms. No member will serve more than two full, three-year terms (not including partial terms) except the past-chair, whose term may be extended by one year if the normal three-year term prevents service as past-chair. The Board will elect the Council's officers a chair, vice-chair, and immediate past-chair each of whom will serve a one-year term. The Board may appoint a person to fill an unexpired term for the duration of the term.

Conduct of Subsequent Elections

In subsequent elections, the Board of the Council shall appoint a nominating committee of at least nine members, a majority of whom shall be drawn from outside the Board and be representative of the broader higher education community. To ensure a continuing strong link between the work of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the academic community it is committed to serve, the Council shall solicit recommendations for members of the nominating committee from presidential associations, accrediting bodies, and others.

Interim Bylaws and Operating Principles

Among the first orders of business for the newly formed Council will be the development of an interim set of bylaws and operating principles, based on the concepts in this proposal and legal requirements necessary to form the initial Articles of Incorporation and Constitution of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The Council also will develop statements of operating principles, both for itself and for the accrediting bodies it recognizes, on such matters as fairness, conflict of interest, and autonomy of institutions and accrediting organizations. These drafts will be made available to the higher education community for comment prior to final adoption by the Board.

VI. COUNCIL'S SUB-STRUCTURE

It is essential that there be a strong linkage between the Council and the accreditation community. In each of the major functions of the Council, it is assumed that an active and continuing involvement of the higher education accrediting community will be sought.

The Board of Directors has authority to develop operating units within the Council. It will develop standing committees of regional and specialized accrediting bodies. It also may develop committees to address the Council's purposes as well as ad hoc committees to meet special needs. It may organize formal advisory groups for policy, for recognition, and for programs that would be composed of presidents, representatives from accrediting bodies, and representatives from the broader higher education community. Whatever its final form, it is expected that the Council will reach out to draw on the resources and counsel of the broader higher education community.

VII. FINANCES

Funding

Support of the work of the Council must be borne primarily by those who will benefit most academic institutions. Presidentially based associations, as representatives of the institutions, must be involved, and accrediting organizations also supported by institutions have much at stake. The Council must be accountable to the broadest higher education constituency possible, and its influence and effectiveness will depend on broad support and involvement from the entire higher education community. It is anticipated that the budget, to be phased in over time, will be approximately \$1.5 million. Following are the basic sources of revenue for the Council.

1. Membership fees for institutions will be assessed through regional* accreditors, based upon the institutions' total educational and general expenditures and mandatory transfers (exclu-sive of medical school and hospital budgets) for the previous college year as reported to IPEDS. Initial annual fees will range from \$100 to \$2,000 per institution as follows:

<u>E&G General Budgets</u>	<u>Annual Fee</u>
Under \$10M	\$100
\$10M-\$40M	\$300
\$40M-\$100M	\$1,000
Over \$100M	\$2,000

2. Recognized accrediting bodies and presidentially based associations will be assessed nominal sustaining fees for the support of the Council (\$2,000 for each organization).
3. Recognized specialized/professional accrediting bodies, in addition to the sustaining fee, will submit fees to the Council based on the number of institutions for which they accredit programs. These fees will approximate \$25 per institution at which the agency accredits programs.
4. The Council is empowered to assess fees or make charges for specific services, activities, and materials, such as reimbursement of expenses in connection with recognition activities, costs associated with conferences, and costs of publication materials.
5. One or more foundation grants will be sought to support policy analysis and experimentation with new approaches to accreditation toward the benefit of academic institutions, programs, and accreditors.

* *Dues for free-standing special purpose institutions will be assessed by the primary accrediting body according to the same schedule.*

Budget & Audit

The Board of Directors will approve the Council's annual operating budget. The budget is predicated on the need for a senior executive director with sufficient experience, expertise, and stature to lead the work of the Council. The revenues are sufficient to employ a small, qualified staff and to cover other operational expenses.

The Council will be audited annually by a certified public accountant, who will submit a written report promptly following each fiscal year. Copies of the report will be provided to the Board and will be available to all member institutions as well as to others as determined by the Board. The Council's fiscal year will be determined by the Board and fixed by the bylaws.

VIII. LOCATION

A location will be selected by the Board of Directors of the Council to allow it to accomplish its mission and purposes in the most effective and efficient manner. The Presidents Work Group on Accreditation assumes the location selection may well be Washington, DC, given the need to coordinate the work of the Council with the balance of the higher education community. Nonetheless, the decision on location is reserved for the Board of Directors.

IX. ADMINISTRATION

The Board of Directors will employ a chief executive officer and staff to conduct the Council's business.

X. RATIFICATION OF THE PROPOSAL

The Council will be established if approved by a simple majority of institutions voting. Efforts will be made to secure a high rate of response from voting institutions. Individuals eligible to vote on the formation of the Council and for the initial Board of Directors will include chief executive officers of institutions that were accredited by an accrediting body (51 percent of whose accredited institutions award degrees) recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation at the time of its dissolution on December 31, 1993, or subsequently by the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) as of December 31, 1995.

MEMBERS

PRESIDENTS WORK GROUP ON ACCREDITATION

Stanley O. Ikenberry, *Chair*
Regent Professor and President Emeritus
University of Illinois

Michael E Adams, *Co-chair*
President, Centre College

Jacquelyn Belcher, *Co-chair*
President, DeKalb College

George R. Boggs
President, Palomar College

Gerhard Casper
President, Stanford University

John Casteen
President, University of Virginia

Thomas E. Corts
President, Samford University

William Delauder
President, Delaware State University

Ann H. Die
President, Hendrix College

Vera King Farris
President, The Richard Stockton College
of New Jersey

Robert Glidden
President, Ohio University

Franklyn Jenifer
President, University of Texas at Dallas

Eamon Kelly
President, Tulane
University

Ira Lechner
Trustee, Randolph Macon College

Peter R. MacDougall
President, Santa Barbara City College

Norman Maldonado
President, University of Puerto Rico System

Sister Mary Andrew Matesich
President, Ohio Dominican College

Stephen Morgan
President, University of LaVerne

Christopher B. Nelson
President, St John's College

Sherry H. Penney
Chancellor, University of Massachusetts Boston

John Pickelman
Chancellor, North Harris Montgomery
Community College District

Gregory S. Prince, Jr.
President, Hampshire College

Sister Kathleen Ross
President, Heritage College

Joyce Tsunoda
Chancellor for Community Colleges
University of Hawaii System Office

John D. Welty
President, California State University Fresno

Billie Stewart
Consultant

PRESIDENTS WORK GROUP ON ACCREDITATION

One Dupont Circle, Suite 800

Washington, D.C. 20036-1193

Phone (202) 939-9461

Fax (202) 833-4762