

ASPA NEWS

ASSOCIATION OF SPECIALIZED & PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITORS

DISTANCE LEARNING AND SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE: THE FUTURE IS NOW

JANUARY 2007

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CHAIR'S REMARKS

By MARY JANE HARRIS, CAPTE, PHYSICAL THERAPY;
CHAIR, ASPA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dear ASPA Colleagues:

Well, another six months have passed since my last message and I continue to marvel at the many activities that have occurred and the work that is being done on your behalf and with your assistance and support. The accomplishments that I want to share with you are the result of the time, energy and efforts of a significant number of ASPA members. This list is in a generally chronological order.

In August, several members of ASPA attended an invitational Accreditation Summit, sponsored by ASAHP, the Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions. This meeting was the second such gathering of Deans of schools of allied health and representatives of the organizations that accredit programs in their schools. This is the same group that

has met prior to many ASPA meetings. The meetings continue to foster positive relationships with the community. The day long summit allowed for more in depth discussion of issues confronting the education and accreditation communities in the health areas.

Once again I am pleased to report that ASPA's latest meeting was a great success. Attendance at the September 2006 meeting in Denver was the highest we've ever had. Perhaps one of the reasons was that all day Sunday was spent in discussions with our colleagues from the regional associations about issues confronting the broad accrediting community. I found the exchange to be very valuable; the reactions of some other attendees can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. In addition to the Sunday session, we had a very useful members-only discussion that resulted in several actions taken at the Business meeting (more about that below.) Following the business meeting, the professional development session addressed the subject of on-site visitor training and was very well received, especially the well thought out and well rehearsed role play sessions. I know I took away several ideas about how the training that we do in our agency might be improved. Kudos to the Professional Development Committee for planning such a great program!

The Business Meeting was the first one to be held under our new bylaws, which give the membership more responsibility to generate business for consideration. So, kudos also go to the ASPA members in attendance at the business meeting for stepping up and presenting motions for consideration.

Actions taken at the meeting include a revision of the criteria for membership and the establishment of two new Task Forces. The Task Force on Public Information is being chaired by Ulric Chung (ACPE: Pharmacy) and the Task Force on the Professional

Doctorate is being chaired by Olive Kimball (Past CEO of NAACLS: Clinical Laboratory Sciences).

In early October, the ASPA Board of Directors met to plan the Spring 2007 meeting and to conduct other ASPA business, such as appointing members of the Task Forces authorized at the Fall meeting. The Spring meeting will be held in the Washington DC area. Plans for the meeting and the professional development session are described elsewhere in the newsletter.

In mid-October, several ASPA members participated in an invitational Roundtable sponsored by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to discuss issues related to the report of the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education, the possible negotiated rule-making for accreditation announced by the Department of Education, and other issues related to reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Representatives of regional and national accrediting organizations and institutional organizations were at the meeting, as were several individuals who represent the community's interest with Congress.

During October and November, there were four hearings related to the negotiated rulemaking proposed by the Department of Education. ASPA members provided testimony at three of the hearings, using talking points developed by the ASPA External Recognition Issues Committee (ERIC). In addition to developing the talking points, ERIC met numerous times by conference call to address the many issues surrounding the report of the Spellings Commission, reauthorization of the HEA, and other events with likely ramifications for accreditation.

At the end of October, the CHEA 10th Anniversary Commission met. As a member of the Commission, I had the opportunity to make sure that issues related to specialized accreditation were part of the discussion.

In late November, the Secretary of Education held an Accreditation Forum. Specialized accreditation was represented among the participants, as well as in the audience that observed the Forum. The format of the Forum, though, made it difficult to be sure that the issues of concern to the specialized accreditation community were heard among all the other points of view that were represented.

In early December, the USDE National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) met to review several accrediting agencies for continued recognition by the Secretary. As usual, Cynthia Davenport was there to observe NACIQI in action. And several ASPA members were on the Committee's agenda. In addition, ASPA members held a meeting one evening to give ERIC some input

related to future positions/actions we might take next year when reauthorization of HEA will be taken up by the new 110th Congress. Issues related to the NACIQI meeting were also discussed.

As I write this, ASPA has just recently been "in the news" – both the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education* ran e-news articles on December 19 about ASPA's letter to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings following the NACIQI meeting. (A copy of the letter is posted in "Hot Topics" on the ASPA website: www.aspa-usa.org). This letter is not the first time that ASPA has expressed its concerns to the Secretary, but it is the first time we have formally shared our concerns with others including the press and, soon, members of Congress. I think it is fair to say that we have turned a corner in our efforts to preserve the integrity of the accreditation enterprise in the face of negative characterizations, ill-informed criticisms, and misguided suggestions for change.

So, as you can see, we have been busy this past six months. We could not have accomplished this much without the efforts of many ASPA members. Equally importantly, we could not have accomplished what we did without the significant time, effort and dedication of Cynthia Davenport, our Executive Director, who has served as the coordinator of our efforts. Cynthia is, in my opinion, the glue that holds ASPA together. We all owe her a huge debt of gratitude.

As you read this, 2007 is underway and we still have much to do. Your assistance and support will be greatly needed and much appreciated. If you would like to contribute and we have somehow failed to include you, please let us know of your interest. Any success we have in achieving our goal of preserving the best of accreditation will require that we all work together toward that end.

Register Now:
ASPA's Spring 2007 Meeting - March 25-27th
Sheraton Crystal City Hotel in Arlington, VA
Schedules and registration forms also
available in the MEETINGS section of

www.aspa-usa.org.

Click on "Upcoming Events"

Save The Date:
Fall 2007 - September 9-11th
The Brown Hotel in Louisville, KY

SEPTEMBER 2006 MEETING of ASPA AND CRAC

Barbara Beno, Executive Director, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

In September, the executives of the Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC) met with members of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) in Denver, for a joint meeting held in conjunction with ASPA's Fall meeting. The day-long discussions provided the opportunity for regional, specialized and professional accreditors, joined by representatives of other groups with an interest in accreditation, to discuss accreditation in light of the challenges posed by current national discussions of performance and accountability for higher education.

The meeting provided an opportunity for the accreditors to share insights about the "findings" of the Spellings Commission Report and to share information about their formal positions on proposed changes to the Higher Education Act. "It was a good opportunity to exchange candid viewpoints about how peer-based voluntary accreditation might best respond to increased pressures to become more compliance oriented and to provide information in a more consumer-friendly manner" said Barbara Beno, the chair of CRAC. "We learned that regional, specialized and professional accreditors have some common perspectives and interests about proposed legislative changes, about dealing with complex organizational structures that control some of the for-profit institutions, and about assessment of student outcomes."

Participants also learned about the legal precedents for accreditation that were set in a case that was resolved over the summer involving the American Bar Association and a member institution. The courts ruled in favor of the accreditor's ability to set accreditation standards for its member institutions and then to hold the member institutions accountable for meeting those standards in order to retain accreditation. The decision was an important part of case law that clarifies ambiguities that were created in an earlier case, *Auburn University vs. the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges*. It will benefit the cause of peer-based, voluntary quality assurance.

CRAC and ASPA agreed to work together on issues of joint interest, including a project that will define the professional or clinical "doctorate" and distinguish it from the research doctorate that is the more common faculty degree in much of higher

education. Institutions awarding the professional or clinical doctorate vary widely in the quality and amount of professional or clinical and academic experience students need in order to qualify for the degree. The integrity of a legitimate professional doctorate may be eroded without consensus in the higher education community about what a professional doctorate means.

"The joint meeting caused us all to realize we benefit by sharing ideas and information," said Beno. CRAC and ASPA hope to sustain the conversations begun in Denver through more regular communication between the two organizations.

Howard L. Simmons, Chair and Public Member of ACAOM: Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine had this to say about the joint meeting:

It had been more than a decade since I was the Executive Director of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and participated actively in a national meeting involving both regional and specialized accreditors. Without trying to anticipate what my new experience would be like in the role as Chair of a specialized, professional accrediting agency, I eagerly looked forward to becoming acquainted with the issues and the people. And while many of the faces were new to me, the issues seemed more than a little familiar. I was pleasantly surprised by the dynamic and spirited presentations and discussions with the same degree of urgency that I had remembered from my past experiences in the world of accreditation as we practice it in the United States.

What made this experience more alive and meaningful for me was the readily apparent quality of planning for this joint venture between ASPA and CRAC—clearly the organizers had hit a home run with regard to the currency of the topics (e.g., HEA Reauthorization, the Report on the Future of Higher Education, the emergence of new professional doctorate programs and implications for both institutional and specialized accreditors, and up to the moment presentations on new legal environments for accreditation, among others). Not only were the presenters well selected and prepared, but they also were instrumental in keeping the participants fully engaged in meaningful dialogues about the issues, with a strong predilection toward finding appropriate strategies and approaches for the resolution of some issues which are still thorny and result in difficult dialogues (e.g., confidentiality and public disclosure, among these).

To be sure, my sense of rejuvenation from participating in a most satisfying professional

experience must be credited to the positive energy that I felt from the organizers of this enormously successful event! And how did I judge this positive outcome? It is simple. I simply admired the congenial manner in which follow up strategies to deal with a broad political agenda were agreed upon by ASPA and CRAC. Congratulations to all who made it happen!

A member of ASPA, Crystal Calarusse, Academic Director, NASPAA: National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration shared her thoughts about the meeting as follows:

The timing for the joint ASPA/CRAC meeting in Denver could not have been more fitting. The meeting, held shortly before the final release of the Spellings' Commission report on the future of higher education, gave ASPA members, regional accreditors and other friends the chance to openly discuss concerns, challenges and opportunities for the system of accreditation that serves our nation. Before this gathering, I think many of us (including myself) were working off the assumption that regional accreditors shared many of the concerns of the specialized accreditation community, but the question nagged—do we share the same concerns, really? At this meeting it became clear that we do, in fact, share strong concerns on a variety of issues, including regulatory creep and federal micromanagement, uncertainties surrounding the potential of mandated systems of outcomes measures, the increasing and/or redundant academic reporting burden, inconsistent application of Department of Education policies and a lack of meaningful inclusion in the federal decision-making process.

As a consequence of this meeting and other internal dialogues, ASPA's advocacy platform with regard to the Spellings Commission developments has become more sophisticated. I have noticed members advocating more authoritatively on behalf of the specialized community, armed with the knowledge that the viewpoints of the specialized accreditors on many counts mirror the viewpoints of the entire nation-wide system of accreditation. The results of this combined dialogue and other ASPA efforts were evident at the Department of Education's regional negotiated rulemaking hearings and at the Secretary Spellings' Forum on Accreditation, held in DC in November; the concept and benefits of specialized accreditation, which were largely missing from the public discourse are, to some extent, becoming part of the discussion.

Maintaining strong connections and open dialogue with CRAC and other higher education

groups will remain important for ASPA's strategic positioning with regard to national higher education developments.

The final perspective on the Denver meeting comes from someone who is new to ASPA and also somewhat new to accreditation. Terri Taylor Straut, is a Commission member for the newly formed Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE). She writes:

I attended my first ASPA conference in Denver this past September. I was surprised and pleased to find [the broad mix of those who] participated in the first day of the conference. As accreditation professionals representing numerous perspectives, we engaged in great conversations about appropriate and diverse possible responses to the report of the National Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Our dialogue helped us all better understand how we can work together as accreditation professionals to help those outside our field understand the importance and complexity of the work we do. One key action item that emerged was the need for a common glossary of terms so that we can better communicate with each other and with the consumer public.

As a new participant, I was struck by the inherent complexity of accreditation across the diverse ASPA members, and frightened by the idea that any single accreditation body could ever do justice to accreditation with a 'one size fits all' approach.

My organization has also benefited greatly by my participation in the ASPA Professional Development Program, *Good Practices in Site Visitor Training*. As CCIE has been developing our new process for site visits, the experiences and advice shared by the panel members and colleagues I talked with informally have been very valuable. The ASPA conference, as a whole, was very informative and timely for me as a Commissioner of the CCIE.U

Call for Agenda Items: Contact the ASPA office or a member of the board of directors by mid-February to request that a topic be added to the Spring 2007 meeting agenda.

Elections: Materials for the Spring 2007 elections will be mailed to ASPA members prior to the meeting. Elections will be held during the member business meeting on Monday, March 26, 2007. Plan to attend. Your vote counts.

ASPA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SPRING 2007 - DISTANCE LEARNING AND SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

How does an accreditation review of education provided at a distance differ from review of an on-campus learning experience? What do you expect of your site visitors when they review programs that are offered either all or in part on-line? If the educational content is the same, to what extent does the method of delivery matter? And, what about change - and just what makes change substantive?

Dr. Martha Smith Sharpe, Assistant Vice President Institutional Research and Assessment, Old Dominion University, will help attendees explore the ins and outs of these important topics as part of ASPA's Spring 2007 professional development session. Local accreditors may want to take advantage of the "one day" fee to register additional staff for this session - see enclosed forms. U

FALL 2007 - MAKING DISCIPLINED DECISIONS

Decision making, especially within a framework that enhances consistent, defensible decisions, is the general theme being explored by the ASPA Fall Professional Development sub-committee for the program to be presented as part of the Fall 2007 ASPA meeting in Louisville, KY, September 9-11, 2007. With consistency of decision making always a concern in accreditation, this is an important topic. The sub-committee says, "we are working to identify a keynote speaker and to develop a program that includes both activities and invited presentations from among the ASPA membership. Look for a program that will be interesting, stimulating and useful."

The fall program will take place on Monday afternoon, September 10, and Tuesday morning, September 11. Please contact a member of the sub-committee if you have thoughts or ideas to share as they plan this program: Martha O'Conner (moconnorcce@cce-usa.org); Ron Leighton (rleighton@asla.org); Amy Rowe (arowe@abhes.org) or Greg Boyer (gboyer@acpe-accredit.org). U

FALL 2006 - TRAINING THE TRAINER

All accreditors want to do more and do it better when it comes to training the many volunteers who serve as on-site reviewers. They care passionately about what constitutes good practice in site visitor training. This energy and enthusiasm was evident at the meeting in Denver. The Fall ProD sub-committee that planned the session extends a hearty "thank you"

to those who provided such rich fodder for discussion with the talent they displayed in the role-play scenarios.

Special thanks also goes to those who provided an overview of how their organization trains its site visitors and then participated in lively Q&A.

- * Elise Scanlon – Executive Director, Accrediting Commission for Career Schools & Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT)
- * Lynn E. Priddy, Director of Education and Training, The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association
- * Laura Stuetzer, Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA)
- * Ray Bennett, Commission on Accreditation: Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE)

According to the high ratings and comments on the evaluation forms, participants in the session took home many helpful ideas and strategies. U

Applications for membership in ASPA may be submitted on February 15, April 15, August 1 or October 1. See "MEMBER INFO" on the ASPA website or contact Cynthia Davenport for advice.

NAVIGATING NEW LEGAL ENVIRONMENTS

John Przypyszny, partner, Education Law Practice Group, Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, and Lucien "Skip" Capone III, University Counsel, University of North Carolina at Greensboro covered legal issues of concern to accreditors as part of the Denver meeting. Topics included procedural fairness; sales and mergers; working with for-profit institutions; calls for increased public disclosure; and board governance including the implication of Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) for non-profits.

Following the meeting, Skip Capone developed his thoughts on procedural fairness into *A Guidebook to Due Process for Accreditors*. When it comes to accreditation lawsuits, he says, "one area of particular vulnerability has been the failure to provide adequate due process when contemplating adverse action against institutions and programs." Skip stresses that the accrediting body must "conform its actions to fundamental principles of fairness" and in his paper he defines "the boundaries within which agencies have freedom to decide for themselves how best to provide due process." The paper is posted in the RESOURCES section of the ASPA web site (www.aspa-usa.org) with the author's permission. U

ASPA MEMBER PROFILE NCATE: PIONEER IN PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Consider virtually every college student educated by the many programs accredited by ASPA's members. Question: What do they have in common? Answer: Nearly all received their elementary and secondary schooling from teachers educated by programs accredited by NCATE, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

NCATE thus holds a particularly pivotal position in the family of specialized and professional accreditors. The standards that NCATE develops and the protocols it chooses to follow inevitably reverberate widely, for their influence spans virtually the entire landscape of American education, from the primary to the doctoral.

Founded in 1954 by five groups, including the National Education Association (NEA) and the National School Boards Association, NCATE regards accountability and improvement in teacher preparation as central to its mission. Consistent with this mission, NCATE seeks through accreditation to assure the public "that the graduates of accredited institutions have acquired the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn."

NCATE has been a pioneer through its commitment to continuous improvement—in teacher education, nationally, but also in each of the institutions whose programs it accredits. NCATE expects its institutions to provide evidence that candidates have attained the requisite knowledge and skill to be effective practitioners. In 2001 NCATE overhauled its accreditation system in favor of performance-based accreditation focused on learning outcomes. And in 2005, new program review guidelines emphasized common program assessments in addition to "collaboration between education and arts and sciences faculty as well as collaboration among education faculty."

NCATE is itself a remarkable success story, growing especially rapidly within just the past decade. At present, NCATE can claim "to accredit the vast majority of professionally active schools of education." And this majority is a diverse one, including small and large, historically black and Hispanic-serving, public and private, from Stanford to Auburn, and from Luther College to Catholic University.

The NCATE process will strike most ASPA

members as familiar; by and large, and details are available on NCATE's web site. But there may be one or two details worth noting here:

- ♦ Institutions seeking accreditation receive a *two-year* notice prior to the on-site visit, allowing ample opportunity for preparation.
- ♦ Increasingly, an institution's exhibit room, with its library of education unit documents, is being replaced by information made available to review team members on-line prior to the visits.
- ♦ Information gathered by the visiting team becomes the province of the Unit Accreditation Board. The UAB has responsibility for making accrediting decisions.

NCATE's relationship to ASPA? Let NCATE speak: "ASPA has been a friend and a resource to NCATE for many years. ASPA conferences offer NCATE and other specialized accrediting bodies an opportunity and a forum to share and debate current issues, and to highlight successful accreditation practices. The ASPA listserv is an increasingly valuable tool for accrediting bodies, as one can gain helpful information quickly from a great number of colleagues. NCATE is especially proud of the fact that its senior vice president, Donna Gollnick, is a member of the ASPA Board."

Arthur E. Wise, the president of NCATE, has throughout his career "worked toward teacher quality and professionalism, school finance reform, and the advancement of educational research." Art is one of the nation's most prominent spokespersons for our schools and college. Visit NCATE at www.ncate.org

Current and back issues of *ASPA News* are posted to the ASPA web site: www.aspa-usa.org.
Click on NEWSLETTERS.

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Date: January 15, 2007
ASPA News is Edited/Produced in January and July
By Cynthia Davenport and Kim Klein