

ASPA News - July 2000

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Cooperating for Quality - Remarks from the Chair

By David J. Werner, chair, ASPA Board of Directors; Chancellor, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Spring has been busy! ASPA was represented at the AAHE Assessment Forum held on June 16, 2000 in Charlotte, NC. Karen Martinez (AACSB: Management Education) and Frank Licari (CDA/ADA: Dental Accreditation) joined me in a presentation on "The Role of Assessment in Professional Accreditation." The presentation went well. And, it reinforced remarks made by other presentors that the focus on outcome measures by accreditors was keeping the assessment movement alive. I think we got some good publicity for ASPA and for specialized accreditation.

The joint resolution by NASULGC and AAU on specialized accreditation standards that we discussed with David Shulenberger at our spring ASPA meeting was sent to CHEA. Several ASPA members assisted in preparing a strong draft statement of response which was distributed at the CHEA Conference in Washington DC on June 22. David Schulenberger's presentation at the CHEA conference was similar to what he did at the ASPA meeting. Several ASPA members and I made comments and asked questions about the statement. Good or bad, I'm sure there will be more to come on this topic. *(Note: the statement adopted by AAU & NASULGC was forwarded to CHEA for endorsement; CHEA's Specialized Advisory Panel will discuss the statement at the panel's fall meeting. The statement and ASPA's preliminary reply to it are enclosed elsewhere in this mailing.)*

The fall meeting—although it's in August this year—is almost upon us. And, what an unusual meeting it will be with the regional and specialized accreditors meeting together. Key accreditation staff from all eight of the Regional Accrediting Commissions will be attending.

Will all forty-five ASPA members be represented? I certainly hope so. Accreditation is a hot topic on the higher education landscape, and we have much to discuss with our counterparts in the regional commissions. So, get ready for New Orleans. Let's plan to work, but also be ready to enjoy the French Quarter, oysters, crawfish, beignets, jazz, and all the other things that make New Orleans a truly unique American city.

New Orleans Hotel Rooms

Many of you have already booked your hotel rooms for the fall ASPA meeting. This special meeting with the regional accrediting commissions will be held August 27-29 in New Orleans at the Hotel Monteleone. The group meeting rate of \$99 per night plus tax is available **until July 25th**. Call (504) 523-3341 and ask for either the "Accreditation Staff Retreat" or meeting code IASPAC.

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August Accreditation Retreat

By ASPA planning committee chair, Betty J. Horton, COA-NA: Nurse Anesthesia, ASPA Vice-chair

David Werner, ASPA Chair, and David Wolf, Chair of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC), will welcome specialized and regional accreditors to a joint meeting in New Orleans on August 27-29, 2000. The meeting theme, "Cooperating for Quality," emphasizes the joint activities to be held during the event at the Hotel Monteleone.

On Sunday, participants will be able to select between an orientation for new accreditors and the accreditor showcase before they attend the "Share Fair" and reception. (See the enclosed notice calling for contributions to the Share Fair.) Following the Monday morning keynote speakers, participants will be able to select among four separate tracks: cooperative efforts, student learning outcomes, streamlining accreditation, and compliance issues. These four tracks will be repeated, allowing participants to attend two of eight different sessions.

The meeting also includes time for specialized and regional accreditors to meet independently. ASPA will hold its open business meeting on Monday afternoon, followed by a "Strategies to Improve Accreditation" program on the differences between initial and re-accreditation reviews. ASPA's portion of the meeting will conclude early Tuesday afternoon following the professional development session. The committee's topic for New Orleans is "Good Practices in the Use of Annual or Interim Reports."

Accreditors will find registration materials with this newsletter mailing. ASPA members will

want to register prior to July 25th in order to take advantage of the \$50 early bird discount. The discount applies to all member registration fees but not to non-member fees. The reduced registration fee plus a hotel rate of \$99 plus tax is intended to make it affordable for ASPA members to bring additional staff to the fall meeting. As in the past, Board members or chairs are also welcome.

Register now to be part of the first meeting of specialized and regional accreditors since 1993! The ASPA portion of the meeting will begin about 12:00 noon on Sunday, August 27, 2000 and end about 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 29, 2000. _

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Membership Application Deadlines

ASPA welcomes applications for membership from those specialized accreditors that meet the definitions posted on the ASPA web site: www.aspa-usa.org – click on "Membership Info." Applicants must submit proof that their decision-making body has reviewed and endorsed the ASPA member *Code of Good Practice*.

Applications are due by February 15th for review at the spring meeting and by August 1st for the fall meeting. Please contact the ASPA office with any questions not answered by the materials on the web site. _

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The Case of the Public Member

By Marga Rose Hancock, public member, ASPA Board of Directors

Author's note: I undertook a quite unscholarly study of "the public member" to prepare for a panel discussion of the role of public and practitioner members in accreditation, convened at the Spring 2000 ASPA meeting held April 2-4 in Chicago. I gathered useful but informal data on the subject from several sources, including interviews and documents provided by several key observers of the recent history of accreditation. The summary here reflects the offerings of William R. Dill, Judith Eaton (CHEA), Fred Harclerod (founding President of UC Hayward, now retired), Karen Kershenstein (DoE), Jay Levrio (Deputy Director, APMA); and also the responses of 26 accrediting organizations that completed and returned ASPA's survey on the subject of public and professional members – 22 specialized or professional and four regional accrediting bodies. Barbara Brown Robinson, a member of the ASPA Board and a panel collaborator, thoughtfully reviewed and compiled the survey results, and her summary (which she distributed to meeting attendees and has made available via ASPA) amplifies and illustrates the findings presented informally below. I sincerely thank all those who guided and provided information to this inquiry, and take responsibility for the representations below including all

errors of fact or interpretation. – Marga Rose Hancock, April 2000.

Accrediting agencies, required by statute to have public members on their decision-making bodies at a one-to-seven proportion, understand and fulfill this obligation in a variety of ways. This variety will surprise no one who follows the "accreditation industry," where each organization tends to reflect the unique culture of its own history and discipline.

The Public Member in Accrediting Organizations: A Very Sketchy Chronology

Among the ASPA respondents, two reported 1954 as the date their organizations added a public member to their decision-making bodies. This appears to correlate with a drive toward accountability in higher education and accreditation that followed the post-WW1 education boom. The requirement for public representation appears in the US Department of Education (DoE) regulations of 1974, the date cited by the preponderance of survey respondents for the initiation of public representation on their boards. For historical context, people who experienced or know the dominant social themes of that era may mark the consistency with the press for student and public participation in academic and other institutional processes. Within the accrediting community, key studies of that time, and the 1981 Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) provisions speak to the notion of "the public or outside member" and the "[reflection of] the community of interests directly affected by the agency, including effective public representation."

By 1988, the COPA provisions called for the inclusion of "effective, impartial, and objective public representation in ... evaluation, policy, and decision-making processes," and a "fresh, non-professional, outside perspective." Most recently, the 2000 directives of the Secretary of Education delimit the public member as "NOT [emphasis mine] an employee or consultant or member of the governing board of an accredited program or institution, and NOT a member of a trade association or membership organization associated with the agency, and NOT a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of such an individual."

Summary of Survey Results: Definitions, Functions, and Challenges

Accrediting organizations report a range of terms used to describe and suggest the background of their public members, including "public representative," "business or community leader," "at-large member," "corporate executive," or "public consumer." Few define the qualifications of public members beyond a general statement; and when they do so, guidelines largely address these in the negative, e.g. "may not have a degree in the discipline and not employed professionally in the field." No organization provided a job description for the public member, nor did any organization report any special orientation or training for them differing from that provided to educator or practitioner members. Generally speaking, public members participate on an equal basis with other members of the decision-making bodies, though seven of the 22 specialized/professional accrediting organizations reporting do not include public members in review processes and site visits.

Most organizations cited at least occasional difficulties in finding individuals qualified and willing to serve; with lack of commitment and other primary interests contributing to public member resignations. (The "no release time" phenomenon also affects practitioner members.) Organizations locate public members "any way we can," utilizing wide publication of available positions. Resourcefully, some "recycle" public members from other accrediting organizations: in fact, one individual may serve as an "educator" or "practitioner" member on one accrediting organization board, and as a public member on another, either simultaneously or sequentially. At least from time to time, organizations seek specific backgrounds or expertise from public members, most often citing the usefulness of legal expertise for various corporate advice. Others cited the value of administrative, financial, program evaluation, and business perspectives with organizational tasks and "appreciation of staff;" and a few mentioned the value of advocacy provided by their public members. In some case, public members from diverse backgrounds help bring ethnic and gender balance to the governing board.

Although the survey did not include a specific question on resources made available to the public member and the tasks of public representation, no organization cited a budget specifically available for or dedicated to public representation (beyond support for the ordinary expenses of the public member[s] incurred in service to the organization).

Why Would Someone Agree to Become a Public Member?

An array of observations of the public member experience came from the public members themselves. I contacted public members within the reporting group as well as others I know who serve as public members of other boards.

The reasons cited include:

- public service
- resume building
- commitment to educational quality
- opportunity to meet interesting/influential people (fellow board members, school and program officials)
- honoring the request of a respected colleague or organization
- curiosity/intrigue about the "mysterious" processes of accreditation: "cracking the Cabal"
- opportunity to solve own organizational problems vicariously
- "revenge on abusive schoolteachers"
- Frequent Flier miles/get away from home and work
- "anthropological interest" -- how does a profession/ discipline perpetuate itself?

The Public Member Experience

Here I drew on my own experience, as well as that of other public members I contacted, to document how the experience of service met expectations, and what problems public members may have encountered.

- Several cited surprise at the seriousness and complexity of accreditation tasks, and the sheer weight of documentation (in a world of "quick takes" and sound bytes).

- The challenges of learning and operating in a specialized language – both of the discipline and of accreditation.
- Lack of clarity about the ultimate consequences of accreditation decisions.
- Suspicious or downright disrespectful attitudes of school officials toward individuals without direct expertise in their fields or in education. Some cited the "weird dynamic" when school officials tried to "get their angle" on or after a visit.
- Lack of a peer group – "No one knows how to talk to the public member – not fellow board members, not others on site visits, not school officials." "How about a meeting of public members in accreditation?"
- "How do I represent the public?" When asked specifically about how they understood or performed the representative tasks implied by their positions, public members had few ready answers.

How DO Public Members Represent the Public?

The structure and language of public membership on accrediting organization boards gives a large responsibility for public accountability and "representation of the public interest" to public members. I hasten to add that other organizational features and regulatory requirements address this public purpose in accreditation. But given the evidence, the expectations accrediting organizations have of their public members, the way in which both the organizations and educational institutions regard and treat public members, and the self-perceptions and challenges described by public members, I conclude that public members generally – in the view of their colleagues in accreditation and in their own self-perceptions – add a unique perspective to accreditation processes and practices. Thus the participation of public members, variously but consistently, adds to the value of accreditation to accredited units and to the public served by them.

I would also suggest that accrediting organizations frequently miss or underplay opportunities to utilize public members to a kind of idealized maximum, to genuinely and manifestly represent the public – for instance, by providing a budget and means that would allow a public member to gather and reflect wide public response to a particular question of policy or procedure. I hope that the accrediting community, through this and further examination of the experience of public membership, can consider the opportunity to advance public understanding of the value of accreditation through effective, well-informed, appropriately supported, and visible utilization of the unique opportunity of public membership. _

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Update on Chicago Spring 2000 Meeting

Washington attorney, Mark Pelesh, accepted ASPA's invitation to attend the Sunday afternoon "Members Only" session to discuss the interest shown in the validity and reliability of accreditation standards by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity during the committee's December 1999 meeting. Pelesh responded to many questions during the lively discussion.

On Monday, David E. Shulenburg, Provost, University of Kansas, met with ASPA to discuss the draft AAU and NASULGC "Statement of Good Practices in the Establishment of Specialized Accreditation Standards." After setting a context for the statement, Shulenburg responded to specific questions and noted the many points raised during discussion. The statement and ASPA's preliminary response to it are included with this mailing.

Here are a few other highlights from the spring meeting. (*The ASPA board and members receive meeting minutes in a separate mailing; others may request a copy by contacting the ASPA office.*)

- **Accreditor Showcase:** Once again, the Showcase was well-attended by members and guests. Brief presentations set the stage for an informative dialogue with:
- **Jeptha Dalston**, President & CEO, ACEHSA: Health Services Administration
- **Kathleen Megivern**, Executive Director, CAAHEP: Allied Health Education Programs

This popular program segment helps member and non-member accreditors learn more about their accreditation colleagues.

- **Strategies for Improving Accreditation:** *Minding Your P's and Q's: Does Use of Public and Practitioner Members Contribute to Quality?* ASPA Board Members, Marga Rose Hancock, public member, and Barbara Brown Robinson, practitioner member explored how these members contribute to the accreditation process. Attendees also received a detailed written report of results of the survey on use of public members and practitioners.
- **Number of Specialized Site Visits:** ASPA chair, David Werner, chancellor, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, provided a draft report on his study of the number of site visits conducted by member and non-member specialized accreditors to institutions listed in the Higher Education Directory.
- **Compensation & Funding Surveys:** A summary of the results of the surveys was presented at the Spring 2000 meeting. All accreditors who participated in the survey received the detailed statistical analysis and report. Others may contact the ASPA office to purchase the analysis and report. These surveys are conducted by ASPA at three-year intervals for the benefit of the specialized accreditation community.
- **Professional Development:** The Tuesday "Pro D" session was *Living the ASPA Code of Good Practice: Technology and Distance Education*.

The morning included the following segments:

- **"Is This Still Kansas? Distance Education Technology Today & Tomorrow"** – Michael Lambert, Executive Director, DETC: The Distance Education Training Council, described current and future applications of distance technologies and the implications for educational programs and their delivery.
- **"Maintaining Your Reputation: Quality Education On & Off Campus"** – Jane

Robbins, Professor and Dean, School of Information Studies, Florida State University, discussed quality control issues for programs offered via distance education.

- **"National Perspectives on Quality Assurance in Distance Education"** – Judith Eaton, President, CHEA: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, presented an overview of national trends in quality assurance of distance education

The afternoon included the following segments:

- **"Going Green: a Paperless Self-Study?"** – Ulric Chung, Executive Assistant Director, ACPE: Pharmacy, discussed ways in which using technology may or may not improve efficiency. His "Guidelines for Developing Customized Software" should be useful for other projects as well.
- **"A Synchronous Discussion of an Asynchronous Review – AKA – A Live Person Talking About a Virtual Visit"** – Jane Robbins, Professor and Dean, School of Information Studies, Florida State University, returned in the afternoon wearing a different hat. She discussed the pros and cons of a virtual site visit she chaired for the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation.
- **"Rapid Fire Update of Technology in Accreditation"** – The following accreditors described how their agencies are using technology in accreditation activities. They provided a brief assessment of how well it is working for them and brain-stormed with meeting participants about possible future uses of technology.
- **Milton Blood** – AACSB: Management Education – Creative database management
- **Antoinette Mitchell** – NCATE: Teacher Education – Electronic data collection
- **Al Rudisill** – NAIT: Industrial Technology – User friendly web page design issues and choices
- **Joyce Urbeck** – AOA: Optometric Education – Web-based training for site visitors
- **Kimberly Werner** – ACPE: Pharmacy – Team-member training on CD rom

The evaluation forms reflected high ratings and praise for another well-planned and useful professional development day. The committee encourages you to forward ideas for future sessions to the ASPA office or to committee co-chairs, Mary Jane Harris (CAPTE: Physical Therapy) and Ann O'Neill (ALA: Library and Information Studies).

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(**Here's How to Contact ASPA:**

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