ASPA Chair's Remarks: January 2011

ASPA Leadership Transition

Peter H. Vlasses, Executive Director, ACPE: Pharmacy

ASPA's inaugural Executive Director, Cynthia Davenport left her position on January 1, 2011 after nearly 16 years of valued service. The ASPA Board of Directors reluctantly accepted her resignation at their May 2010 meeting. Under Cynthia's leadership, ASPA has grown from its modest beginnings with fewer than 40 members to a vital member organization with 61 members. In a humble but effective, behind the scenes manner, and as ASPA's only staff member, Cynthia managed all aspects of the organization, from planning board and member meetings, to working with committees to help them achieve their charges, to writing eloquent letters to various stakeholders defending the ASPA Principles. To honor her, the ASPA Board of Directors established the Cynthia A. Davenport Award as the highest award presented to a member of ASPA or friend of ASPA for superior effort on behalf of specialized and professional accreditors. The inaugural Award was presented to Cynthia in September 2010 during her last meeting as Executive Director. In an open microphone session, many ASPA members shared their sincere gratitude and appreciation for Cynthia's meritorious service.

“Nothing is secure but life, transition, and the energizing spirit.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

From May to October the ASPA Board conducted a search to identify the next ASPA Executive Director. Eighty five applications were received and screened. The many qualified applicants made the choice very difficult. However, after a series of telephone and in person interviews, the Board unanimously voted to offer the position to Joseph Vibert, who accepted. The Board found Joseph to have excellent communication skills with a proven history of collaborative and consensus-building management.

Joseph's educational preparation includes a Bachelor of Science in Physical Therapy and a Master's degree in Business Administration from McGill University, Montreal, Canada. Prior to this appointment, Mr. Vibert served as Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (The Alliance) in Toronto, Canada, a position he held since 2006. In this capacity he led the organization responsible for testing competency for entry to practice through the administration of a licensing examination and assessment of credentials of foreign-trained professionals. In addition, he helped in the development and review of accreditation standards for physical therapy educational programs. He has served as the Director of the Physical Therapy Assistant Program at Keiser University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he directed a training program for physical therapist assistants. These efforts led to a 10-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education.

Joseph began his new position in January 2011. As part of the transition, Cynthia and Joseph discussed ASPA's history and the varied responsibilities of the Executive Director. Joseph observed the October ASPA Board of Directors planning meeting during which plans were made for the spring 2011 ASPA meeting. As mutually agreed, Cynthia will serve as a consultant to the ASPA Board on transition-related projects during January. The ASPA Board of Directors is pleased that Joseph and Cynthia are both committed to this important transition of leadership. The Board believes that ASPA will continue to grow and thrive under Joseph's leadership and that ASPA members will continue to be well served.

Chair's personal note: This is my last column as ASPA's Chair, as my third and final allowable year of service ends on April 30, 2011. I am honored and humbled to have been elected to serve and have attempted to serve ASPA members to the best of my ability. I want to thank the ASPA Board and Cynthia for all their support and hard work during my tenure. I look forward to the next phase of ASPA's development under Joseph's leadership.

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Cynthia says “Thank You”

At ASPA's Fall meeting, I made some brief farewell remarks to the ASPA Board and Members. I mentioned that Ernie Harwell (long time Detroit Tigers’ baseball sportscaster) died on May 5, 2010 just two days after I’d told the ASPA Board of my plans to retire on January 1, 2011. In talking about his death, reporters repeated Harwell’s sign-off from his final game in 2002. His remarks served as a place for me to start in saying my own goodbyes.

“It’s time to say goodbye,” Harwell said, “but I think goodbyes are sad and I’d much rather say hello. Hello to a new adventure. I’m not leaving, folks. I’ll still be with you, living my life in Michigan – my home state – surrounded by family and friends. ... And rather than goodbyes, please allow me to say Thank You - thank you for letting me be part of your family. .... I might have been a small part of your life, but you’ve been a very large part of mine. And it’s been my privilege and honor to share with you the greatest game of all,” he said.

If you substitute Minnesota for Michigan, Harwell’s words capture my feelings as I leave ASPA. I was an educator before I became an accreditor. ASPA brought both roles together for me and the Board and Members worked with me to help ASPA play the “game” well. ASPA grew to be a success, I believe, because of the faith the ASPA community had in me and because of the support and room to grow I was given. I am honored that you established an Award in my name. It is a legacy I did not expect and one I will treasure. Now it is time to offer your faith, trust and support to your new executive director. As I’ve been getting to know Joseph, I am convinced that he will “do you proud.” Best wishes, Joseph. Thank you, ASPA.

Joseph says “Hello”

I am excited to begin my work and am eager to meet and collaborate with members as the new Executive Director of the organization that is the national voice representing specialized and professional accreditors. ASPA members are faced with increasing challenges and I trust that I will be able to contribute to the advancement of ASPA’s mission and support the ability of accreditors to self-govern while working to ensure and enhance quality among accredited programs and schools.

I’d like to express my appreciation to the ASPA Board for giving me this wonderful opportunity. Former Executive Director, Cynthia Davenport, and Peter Vlasses, Board Chair, have both been very helpful during the transition. Working closely with the board and members, I hope to build on the strong foundation that has been developed for the organization as we grow and enhance services.

I look forward to engaging our members and key stakeholders in the advancement of the quality of professional education and training in the US.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

Competency-Based Standards: Are All Outcomes Created Equal?

Accreditation has been focusing on methods of assessing student learning for nearly two decades. The specialized accreditation community has focused primarily on competency-based standards to measure student achievement. Such competency-based standards usually take the form of very specific knowledge, skills, and abilities that are generally regarded as essential for the graduate of a program to possess in order to be successful as an entry-level professional in a particular field.

Representatives from several specialized accrediting organizations will talk about their experience with competency-based standards, in particular:

♦ The impact their competency-based standards have had on the preparation of students for entry into the profession,
♦ The effect their competency-based standards have had on their relationship with practitioners in the profession,
♦ How their competency-based standards have been changed as they have gained more experience in using them,
♦ How their use of competency-based standards has affected their accreditation processes, and
♦ The relative importance of competency-based standards and other non-competency-based standards in their accreditation system.

Plan now to attend the Spring 2011 ASPA meeting in Chicago to join in the discussion. An overview schedule for the meeting is enclosed with this mailing and available on the ASPA website.
Accreditation: Cops, Coaches or Both?

By Neil Harvison, ASPA Board member, and Director Accreditation & Academic Affairs, ACOTE: Occupational Therapy

At the Fall 2010 ASPA meeting in Cincinnati attendees participated in a two panel sessions in which panelists were asked to reflect on current accreditation practices and how these practices might change in response to the rapidly evolving higher education environment. The first panel presented the perspective of the institutions and the accreditation recognition bodies.

Susan Hattan, representing the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), opened the session by acknowledging that institutions respect the role of accreditors but were concerned that the growing costs of education and loan default rates may lead to greater government involvement in the process. She noted that the volunteer based peer review process is the strength of the system and leads to overall improvements in higher education. When looking towards the immediate future Hattan stressed the importance of respect for institutions' individual missions and concerns over possible release of information to the press regarding accreditation reviews and actions. Hattan noted that release of such information can lead to unfair damage to the reputation of institutions and that many smaller institutions do not have the resources to recover from bad press.

Leah Mathews, from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), voiced concern that accreditation is moving towards a primary role of enforcement. Matthews noted the recent House and Senate hearings that focused on loan repayments, credit hours and the practices of proprietary institutions as evidence of the increased pressure being placed on the accreditation community to assume the role of the “cop.” Karen Kershenstein, substituting on the panel for Kay Gilcher from the United States Department of Education (USDE), supported Matthew's argument, saying that recent developments on the “Hill” and the focus on compliance in the HEOA (2008) are forcing accreditors into the “cop role.” Both panelists, however, cautioned accreditors not to lose sight of the vital role they play as coaches. Kershenstein noted a “positive tone” within the Department towards the role of accreditors and the support for a culture of assessment that leads to improvements in student learning. Kershenstein added that the pace of change in higher education today is unprecedented and noted that accreditation agencies must prepare themselves to respond as rapidly as the environment around them changes.

Following-up on Kershenstein's comment on the rapid pace of change, a question was posed to the panel on the length of accreditation and frequency of reports that would allow accreditors to best monitor programs. Kershenstein responded that the key is selecting the right outcomes to be monitored and having mechanisms in place to allow investigation when a problem is identified. The length of accreditation will develop out of this process. Hattan warned that accreditors must be careful not to monitor for “monitoring sake” and urged that the key outcomes be carefully selected. She voiced the institutions' concerns about “regulatory creep.”

A second panel of accreditors addressed the question of how the three Ps of policy, procedure and practice help accreditors walk the line between cop and coach. Representatives from national, regional and specialized accreditors talked about the balance between addressing the day to day functions of accreditation and the competing mandates emerging from Washington.

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Michael White, Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools, and Roger Williams, Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training, represented the national accreditors. White commented on the struggle of balancing the different views, priorities, concerns and processes of the institutions and external regulatory authorities. He stressed the importance of establishing common terminology, saying that accreditors need to recognize that they “cannot be all things to all Kings.” Williams presented a chronology of his agency’s changes in an attempt to find the correct balance. He noted a growing focus on ensuring compliance.

Karen Solinski, from the Higher Learning Commission, discussed how her regional accrediting agency is attempting to balance the growing role of “cop” with their mission to encourage institutional improvement. Solinski briefly described her agency’s “pathways initiative” to separate compliance requirements from improvement initiatives. Ralph Wolff, from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges – Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, shared that his agency is trying to develop policies, procedure and practices that will enable them to address what they see as five key issues: (1) What is the best way to collect and monitor information on retention and degree completion?; (2) What level of learning is good enough for a degree and how is this measured?; (3) How do we measure credits?; (4) What is transparency and what must be on the website?; and (5) How do we address the shifting “ecology” of the higher education landscape? When do courses, for example, turn into a degree?

The institutional accreditors were followed by Shonagh Merits (PAB: Planning) and Bob Sabilis (LCME: Medicine) representing the specialized accreditors. Both panelists discussed the challenge of the increasing demands to be the “cop” while maintaining their role to support and educate members of their professional communities.

The participants in the room noted the common threads across all levels of accreditation. While all panelists acknowledge the growing pressure to be “cops” and focus on compliance, none was willing to surrender their role as a coach and facilitator. It was noted that accreditors need to get this message out to the higher education community and that this would be best accomplished through cooperation and a common voice from the accreditation community. While there will always be differences between accrediting agencies, the many commonalities could and should be the focus of a strong alliance of accrediting bodies.

Multi-Campus and Distance Learning Fall ProD Focus

The Fall 2010 Professional Development Program received a big thumbs up from ASPA members and others in attendance. Invited keynote speaker Pete Bill, Professor of Veterinary Pharmacology and Director of Veterinary Technology at Purdue University kicked off the program with a very insightful presentation on the approaches taken in the multi-campus environment of veterinary technology programs. Then ASPA members Crystal Calarusse (NASPAA-COPRA: Public Affairs & Administration), Doug Clarke (CAPTE: Physical Therapy), and Laura Rasar King (CEPH: Public Health) spoke about experiences their agencies have had in accrediting programs that are multi-campus and/or employ distance learning methodologies. Using tips from the panel discussion, attendees engaged in lively discussions of three cases crafted from actual multi-campus and/or distance learning situations. One focused on lines of authority in a bi-campus memorandum of understanding, another described a multi-state structure and asked for pros and cons on whether it should be treated as a single or multi-campus program, while the third case asked when change was so substantive that the program was really new rather than changed.

The second half of the program began with ASPA members Lee Van Dusen (CCE-COA: Chiropractic), Jenny Gunderman (CACREP: Counseling) and Sharon Tanner (NLNAC: Nursing) addressing the challenges of ensuring consistency and achieving efficiency in multi-campus and/or distance learning programs. The program ended with a crowd-pleasing and very relevant presentation by Dr. Bill on “Resolving Conflicts through a Myers Briggs Lens.”

Take home messages included 1) the wisdom of anticipating situations and proactively developing policies rather than doing so as a reaction to the unanticipated, and 2) how technology can be used in creative ways to document compliance with specific standards. A lot of information was shared in a short amount of time! The Fall ProD team thanks all those who served as panelists and those who engaged in the lively discussions throughout the Fall ProD program.

"I'll be happy to give you innovative thinking. What are the guidelines?"
The Bad News Continues for the For-Profit Sector

Kathleen Megivern, vice-chair, ASPA Board, and Executive Director, CAHHEP: Allied Health

I began my article in the July issue of this newsletter with the following statement: “It would be fair to say that for-profit higher education has been under siege for several months now…” While I anticipated that the “siege” would continue, I don’t think any of us expected it to be quite as severe as it became.

The second hearing held by Senator Tom Harkin (D, IA) of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) on August 4th contained even bigger “bombshells” than the first hearing last June (reported on in the last newsletter).

The first witness at the August hearing was Gregory Kutz, Managing Director of the Office of Forensic Audits and Special Investigations, Government Accountability Office. Mr. Kutz came armed with videos made by “secret shoppers” who had posed as potential students. The GAO did “undercover tests” at 15 randomly selected for-profit colleges and found “deceptive or otherwise questionable statements” made to the undercover applicants at all 15. Four of the applicants were encouraged by college admissions personnel to falsify their financial aid forms. Others were given misleading or exaggerated information about job placement and future earnings prospects.

Those who had defended the industry at the June hearing, stating that the problems were with just a “few bad actors,” suddenly found themselves faced with evidence of far more widespread fraudulent activity. Stock values dropped, several states attorneys general announced investigations of their own and the picture was bleak for the entire sector. Layoffs were announced by the University of Phoenix and then by Kaplan, mostly in the area of admissions.

Then, on December 7, 2010, an article appeared in the Washington Post reporting that the GAO had revised portions of the highly critical report that had been released last summer. The revisions “softened” several of the examples from the original report. For example, in one instance, the original report stated that it was a representative of the college who told the undercover applicant that “by the time the college would be required by [the] Education [Department] to verify any information about the applicant, the applicant would have already graduated from the 7-month program.” In fact, the revised version says it was the undercover applicant who “suggested” that possibility and the college representative simply acknowledged it was true.

Senator Mike Enzi (R, WY), the ranking Republican on the HELP Committee wrote a letter on 12/7/2010 to the head of the GAO saying that the revisions raise “a number of troubling questions.” He asked that the GAO withdraw their testimony and explain the revisions. Senator Harkin insists that the revisions are minor and “do not change the substance of the report.” In the meantime, on the House side (where the chairmanship of the Education and Labor Committee changed in January), six members signed onto a letter dated 12/21/2010 to the GAO demanding a detailed explanation and asking that someone from GAO – not Mr. Kutz – brief their staffs on exactly what happened at the GAO.

What does all of this mean for the “gainful employment” proposal expected to be issued by the Department of Education? One hint of the battles to come was reported on December 17th by Bloomberg:

“John Kline, the incoming leader of the House of Representatives education committee, said he is considering measures to block an Obama administration plan to tighten for-profit colleges’ access to student aid.

The Department of Education has proposed tying for-profit colleges’ eligibility for U.S. student aid to graduates’ incomes and loan repayment rates. In September, after receiving more than 90,000 comments, the department delayed making public the final rule until early next year.

Kline, a Minnesota Republican who will become chairman of the education committee in January, said he would rather that nonprofit and for-profit colleges be required to disclose graduation rates, costs, and graduates’ debt burdens to all applicants. The so-called gainful employment rule is scheduled to go into effect in 2012, and Kline said he has been looking at ways of “stopping” it.

“At the very least, you need to push this thing back,” he said yesterday during an interview with reporters in his office. The rule has been getting “an enormous amount of pushback and getting it in a bipartisan way.”

Join ASPA Now!
Applications for membership in ASPA may be submitted on:
February 15
April 15
August 1
October 1
See “MEMBERSHIP” on the ASPA website and contact the ASPA office for advice.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Consistency - A 360 Approach

Attendees at the Spring 2011 ASPA meeting won’t want to miss the profession development session on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. The program, A 360 Approach to Consistency in Accreditation, will focus on how to maintain and enhance consistency in accreditation operations, governance and outreach, based on topics selected as most important by ASPA members. Sessions will be presented in a variety of formats, providing participants with information and tangible products to use for improving areas ranging from staff and board member training, report writing, decision-making, and communications. You can find more information about the session by referring to the enclosed flyer and on the ASPA website. Be sure to register for the Spring 2011 ASPA meeting, today!

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 2011 meeting agenda.

ASPA Produces Video for Students and their Advisors

At the Fall 2010 ASPA meeting, the attendees viewed the first showing of the ASPA-produced video entitled Specialized & Professional Accreditation: What Should I Know? The video, developed with member dues funds, provides information about specialized and professional accreditation in a contemporary format. The video is readily accessible on the Internet (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zBdyBNwwmo). We hope it will be useful to students and those who advise students – i.e., parents, counselors and others with an interest in higher education. In the video, students, an academic administrator, and ASPA-member leaders in accreditation highlight the importance of accreditation and discuss the different types of accreditation for higher education institutions and their programs. The video includes questions to ask about program accreditation and resources to help viewers learn more about accreditation.

In addition to distributing the video link to the ASPA members for posting on their web sites, former ASPA Executive Director Cynthia Davenport developed an external communication plan to reach potential audiences who could benefit from the information on the video. A press release was distributed to Inside Higher Education and The Chronicle of Higher Education and a number of key stakeholders, including the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC, to the national office and to state affiliates) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA and its state chapters). The video link can also be found on the ASPA web site (www.aspa-usa.org).