

## ASPA News - January 1999

**Issue Theme:** "ASPA - Improved Communications"

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### Remarks from the Chair

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

The March meeting marks a change in how ASPA operates. ASPA is maturing, and that maturity is reflected in our needing less time to deal with organizational issues such as developing and refining bylaws and establishing criteria for membership. The changes adopted at the fall meeting allow us to spend far less time conducting the business meetings of ASPA and give us far more time to focus on the central issues facing specialized and professional accreditation. My hope is that we can conclude all of our "business" by mid-morning on Monday, leaving the rest of Monday to focus on current events and other issues that can improve the accreditation process. And, of course, we will continue to have all day Tuesday devoted to professional development.

The schedule for March will begin to implement these changes. The changes will begin with the addition of an "Accreditors' Forum." This short, unstructured segment will be conducted in an "open microphone" format and is intended to allow members to raise emerging issues or other timely topics. This slot might also be used for an "on-the-spot" survey, i.e., those questions where a show of hands could provide helpful information.

A more structured part of the meeting will follow, with a new "Current Events Forum." The format of this segment will vary to reflect the topics of concern. In March, consistent with the overall theme of the meeting, a panel discussion will provide a starting point for what should be a lively exchange of ideas on "Good Accreditation Practices in Communication."

As you may have guessed by now, the overall theme of the March meeting is "Improved Communication." Nowhere is there a greater need for improved communication than with the central administration of colleges and universities, particularly with provosts and presidents. As a group, these individuals have little first hand experience with specialized and professional accreditation. Most come out of fields and programs for which there is no specialized or professional accreditation; most have no experience serving on a visitation team or preparing a self-study. What they know about accreditation is what they have heard from their fellow provosts or presidents or what they have been told by the deans and program directors in their institutions. We know full well that they hear "horror" stories from their peers—horror stories which are often "urban legends"—stories that have little or no basis in fact. But, I think we know less about (and think less about) what provosts and presidents hear from their own deans and program directors. They hear "horror" stories from them as well. And these stories, often greatly exaggerated, may be about demands for resources; the cost of preparing a self study; and the seemingly unending hours devoted to preparing for a site visit.

So, Monday afternoon we will spend some time looking at these issues. How can we improve communication between specialized and professional accreditors and provosts and presidents? And, what can accreditors do to help improve the communication between deans and program directors and the presidents and provosts to whom they report? The answers to these two questions may not be easy, but I believe that nothing is more central to improving the standing of specialized and professional accreditation in the academic community. Plan to join ASPA in this important conversation. I hope to see you in D.C.!

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## Looking Ahead to DC

ASPA's next meeting will be held March 28-29-30, 1999 at The Ritz-Carlton, Pentagon City. Meeting registration forms and an overview schedule for each day of the meeting are included with this mailing.

All ASPA-member accreditors may take advantage of the **\$50.00 "early bird" discount** by sending the meeting registration form with a check made payable to ASPA to the office before **February 22, 1999**. Non-member accreditors and guests may also register for ASPA meetings which are open, except for a Sunday afternoon members-only session and a short executive session for the Board of Directors.

**Sunday:** Committees and Task Forces (TF) will meet prior to a 2:00 p.m. closed members-only session. Contact the ASPA Office with requests for topics to be discussed. Guests may join members at 4:00 p.m. for the Members Showcase. The showcase was such a hit at the Fall meeting that we are doing it again. Come and learn more about your accreditation colleagues and how they do their work. The day ends with a 5:00 p.m. reception for all members and registered guests.

**Monday:** Elections will be held for a number of Board and committee positions. The Board and all members will receive the slate of nominees in a separate mailing prior to the meeting. As the lead article notes, this Board/Membership meeting will also include much more time for discussion of current affairs and other issues that contribute to good accreditation practice. What topic do "you" want to raise during the Accreditors' Forum?

**Tuesday:** ASPA's Professional Development Committee has planned a comprehensive discussion of "Confidentiality, Public Disclosure and Restraint of Trade." The enclosed flyer gives program details and lists scheduled speakers.

**Book Your Hotel Room Now:** The Ritz-Carlton, Pentagon City has reserved a modest block of rooms for the ASPA meeting. Ask for the ASPA group room rate of \$135 per night. The group rate is available two (2) days before and after the meeting, subject to availability. To reserve a room, call 703/415-5000 or 1-800-241-3333 prior to the March 1, 1999 block release date.

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## ASPA Has Its Own URL

*By Alvin Rudisill, Executive Director, NAIT: National Association of Industrial Technology*

Just as accreditation seems at times to be an alphabet soup of acronyms, so does technology. Even if you are not a computer "geek," you may know that "URL" stands for Universal Resource Locator. URLs are unique addresses registered or assigned to a specific user and used to access specific information on the world wide web.

ASPA now has its own URL. It is: [www.aspa-usa.org](http://www.aspa-usa.org).

The old ASPA web page location now includes a notice that the page has been moved and allows the user to click to reach the new location. That option will disappear eventually, so please take a moment to update any "book marks" or shortcuts you've created to the ASPA page. This might also be a good time to set up a shortcut as a reminder about the page, since those who have used the ASPA site say it is very useful.

URLs can specify more than a web site. This relocation has increased ASPA's techno services. ASPA now has a Mailing List — a new computer based mailing system that allows individuals to send a message to the list that is then automatically sent to every list participant. As a place to begin, all ASPA members were subscribed to the list. Other individuals interested in specialized and professional accreditation can follow a set of very straight-forward instructions to subscribe themselves to the list. The list is an "open" list that allows anyone to subscribe, unsubscribe, and send messages. The commands to use for various purposes, including obtaining a list of all subscribers and "help" information are part of the new list page.

The easiest way to access the list is to click on the EMail List button which has been added to

the left-hand menu of the main web page. This takes you to a page where you can click once to send a message to everyone who is part of the list. Replies to e-mails received via the ASPA List can be sent to 1) the entire list or 2) the author of the message only. Most browsers offer both options. Check the address box of the outgoing reply message before sending it to verify who will receive it.

Messages can be sent to the list without going to the page. This means that any members who have access to e-mail but not to other parts of the internet can post messages to the ASPA List. Simply address the message to: [aspa-list@lists.aspa-usa.org](mailto:aspa-list@lists.aspa-usa.org) All members and other users are encouraged to submit suggestions and comments about the ASPA web site. You may do this by sending e-mail to Cynthia Davenport at [aspacd@aol.com](mailto:aspacd@aol.com) or by sending a message via the ASPA Mailing List.

**Cynthia comments:** Addition of this new list has made sending e-mail to your ASPA accreditation colleagues a "one click" process. Many of you have asked me if this was possible. Now it is. Once again, ASPA is very grateful to Al Rudisill, Executive Director, NAIT, who has been instrumental in helping ASPA provide this service and who is currently maintaining the ASPA web site.

Reminder:

- ASPA's URL is: [www.aspa-usa.org](http://www.aspa-usa.org)
- To post messages to the ASPA E-Mail List, address the message to: [aspa-list@lists.aspa-usa.org](mailto:aspa-list@lists.aspa-usa.org)

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## **INQAAHE Invites ASPA to Paris**

*By Carol L. Bobby, CACREP, ASPA Immediate-past Chair*

In September, 1998, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) hosted an invitational working meeting for countries in the trans-North Atlantic region. The meeting was held in Paris, France, just prior to the GATE and UNESCO conferences scheduled in the same city.

For this meeting, INQAAHE brought together representatives of external quality assurance (EQA) agencies from Europe and the United States. The primary purpose of the meeting was to share information that could facilitate common understandings and acceptance of the criteria and procedures used by our respective agencies to evaluate quality and measure educational effectiveness.

The meeting was facilitated by INQAAHE President, David Woodhouse of New Zealand and GATE Associate Director, Bradley Miller of the United States. European EQA agencies

represented at the meeting were from the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, UNESCO's Center for Higher Education (located in Romania), and the Geneva-based Association of European Universities. From the US, regional accreditation agencies represented included Middle States, North Central, Southern, Western and New England. ASPA was invited to send a representative on behalf of specialized accreditation. Carol Bobby attended for ASPA.

Over the course of the two day meeting, discussions focused on both similarities and differences of various quality assurance review processes. The role of the government in quality assurance of higher education systems varied dramatically from country to country, as did the level at which recognition was granted. In most cases, recognition is granted at the institutional level, but many of the EQA agencies talked of moving toward systems for individual program recognition. Some country systems have program recognition reviews only and are considering the pros and cons of moving toward institutional level reviews.

Another topic that revealed both similarities and differences among the participant agencies was the types of evaluative criteria being used. The range encompassed compliance-based to competency-based to open-ended criteria. Finally, while it was noted that all EQA agencies provided training for evaluation teams, the variation in team sizes and expectations was dramatic. The role of agency staff on the team, selection of teams, whether consultation was an expected part of the visit and whether teams should be paid provided interesting debate and conversation.

By the conclusion of the meeting, there was consensus that further dialogue was needed. Cross border issues were a primary interest for all of the EQA groups. The franchising of higher education, the development of virtual institutions, the increase in requests for recognition/accreditation of programs and institutions by multiple agencies, and the concern that differences in our disclosure policies could impede the ability to develop mutual recognition agreements among EQA agencies were primary topics of interest for future meetings.

ASPA's participation in this meeting was instrumental in broadening the base of understanding of the role that programmatic accreditation has played for both institutions and the professions in the United States. It was also instrumental in ensuring that ASPA retains a seat and a voice in international dialogues when it comes to cross border issues, who will be included when and if mutual recognition agreements are drafted, and who will be listed as international lists of credible EQA agencies are prepared. For these reasons, ASPA's continued participation in INQAAHE meetings should be supported by our membership and included in future strategic plans.

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## Highlights from Fall 1998

Timing is important with many things in life and that was true for the Fall 1998 ASPA meeting

held on September 14, 1998 at The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel and Casino. The meeting ended just in time for attendees to get home prior to the arrival of hurricane Georges. Here are a few meeting highlights. (The ASPA board and members receive meeting minutes in a separate mailing; others may request a copy by contacting the ASPA office.)

- **Harry Jonas (LCME: Medicine) and Alvin Rudisill (NAIT: Industrial Technology)** gave an overview of their operations and current interests in ASPA's first Member Showcase. Due to popular demand, the Showcase will be repeated.
- **Revised** Bylaws mandate a smaller seven-member Board of Directors but retain broad diversity with a CEO, a practitioner, a faculty member, a public member and three accreditor members. Committees will be smaller and, in general, will be appointed rather than elected.
- **Finances:** ASPA's finances are within budget and the year-end audit was clean.
- **Membership:** A policy on reinstatement of lapsed membership was adopted, as were additional definitions intended to clarify eligibility for membership in ASPA. (You can find these policies in the Membership section of the ASPA web site or obtain them from the office.)
- **Donna Gollnick, NCATE: Teacher Education** and Mary Beth Kait, MSA: Middle States facilitated a "good practices" exploration of the "Use of Common Data Elements by Regional and Specialized Accreditors." Donna has promised an updated summary of the data collected and analyzed by NCATE.
- **"Striking a Balance Between Process and Outcomes"** was the topic selected by ASPA's Professional Development Committee. Donna L. Cowan, Professor, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Iowa State University, spoke on "Process and Outcomes: An Institutional Perspective." Those at the meeting went home with many useful documents and resources from the Information Share Fair. Many thanks to the committee for a well-planned and informative day.

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## ASPA Represents Members

When members list the benefits of membership in ASPA, representation tops the list. Members are represented in various ways at various times and with varied degrees of success. However, because ASPA exists, specialized and professional accreditors now have a unified voice that they did not have prior to mid-1993. ASPA, on behalf of its members, routinely:

- Accepts speaking requests based on ASPA priorities.
- Monitors CHEA, NACIQI and other meetings.
- Submits comments on issues that impact accreditors.
- Responds to reports and studies, such as the 1998 Cost Commission report and CHEA's draft Recognition Policy and Procedures.
- Sends letters to organizations (such as AAHE and the New York Times) encouraging them to paint more accurate pictures of specialized accreditation in their publications and

promotional materials.

Specialized accreditors take pride in interactions that are governed by courtesy. However, when inaccurate information about our community is promoted as fact and allowed to go unchallenged, all are weakened and all suffer. ASPA members deserve thanks for the strong, ongoing support that has allowed ASPA to grow to the point where it can comment and represent specialized accreditation better when such situations arise.

In December, ASPA nominated Marilyn Fay (formerly with the JRCERT: Radiologic Technology) to serve as ASPA's consultant during the Negotiated Rulemaking process. Marilyn will be part of the Accreditation sub-committee, scheduled to meet between February and June. The Department expects to circulate draft regulations for public comment this summer. Members of the reconstituted ASPA Task Force on DoE Issues and other volunteers will serve as a resource to Marilyn during this process. The results of these negotiations will have a significant impact on the ASPA membership. 26 (of 42) ASPA- member accreditors are DoE recognized. 14 serve as Title IV gatekeepers; 20 gatekeep for "other" federal purposes; eight (8) serve both roles. Marilyn says she is pleased to assist ASPA in this important process and will provide periodic reports.

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## **Fighting Fragmentation**

*By Cynthia Davenport, Executive Director, ASPA*

Whether it is an organization, a recognition process, or a publication, for some time now there has been no one source for full access to reliable accreditation information. Separate organizations exist for each "type" of accreditor: specialized, national institutional and regional. Two separate processes each recognize a sub-set of reputable accreditors. Directories are incomplete because they rely on recognition and use other out-dated editorial or selection policies.

In 1994, when the 1992 Amendments to the Higher Education Act were implemented, about a dozen accrediting bodies were removed from the list maintained by the Secretary of Education. These groups were unable to point to a statute mandating their accreditation as a requirement for access to federal funds and, without this "nexus," they were no longer eligible for federal recognition.

During its formative stages, CHEA debated the eligibility question and, in 1997, adopted an eligibility policy that restricts recognition to accreditors for which the "majority" of their accredited programs or institutions are degree-granting. This policy excludes some previously recognized ASPA-member and other accreditors from participation in CHEA's soon-to-be implemented recognition process.

Higher Education Publications, Inc has for many years published a Higher Education Directory (HED) which included only those institutions accredited by DoE-recognized accreditors. When accrediting bodies were removed from the Secretary's list in 1994, the programs and institutions they accredit were also removed from the HED.

Likewise, the Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education, published by the American Council on Education, first for COPA, then CORPA, and now CHEA is an incomplete directory. Groups that relinquished CORPA recognition were removed from the directory. References to those groups have not been reinstated in either the 1996-97 or the current 1997-98 directory, in spite of CHEA's mandated starting point of relying on prior recognition by COPA as well as subsequent recognition by CORPA.

One could simply sigh or wave a hand airily while saying "bygones." Because of calls I'd been receiving, I decided to pursue the matter. Although CHEA was not ready to discuss their directory, I found that the HED editor was eager to discuss the selection criteria used by HEP and agreed to raise questions about how HEP could best meet the needs of the directory's intended audience.

When my 1999 HED arrived, I was pleased to see that it includes a preface by Thurston Manning explaining HEP's new, broader, selection criteria. A quick scan of the contents, shows that groups previously recognized by DoE or by COPA/CORPA are once again listed. This should be a great benefit to institutions and to their prospective students. For more information about HEP, visit their web site — [www.hepinc.com](http://www.hepinc.com) — or telephone them at 703/532-2300.

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