

PROCEEDINGS

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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Since the publication of our last *Communiqué*, several activities have taken center stage at the Commission. First was the activity of Congress regarding the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. As you know, the House finally passed its version of the bill and the Senate is now poised to discuss it. Once the Senate has adopted its version, a Conference Committee will be appointed to iron out the differences in the two bills. We hope that we will have a final bill before the end of the calendar year.

Another federal activity in which the Commission has participated is the work of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education established by Secretary Spellings. Two regional accrediting executives and I, along with representatives from national and specialized accrediting bodies, were invited to participate in a meeting to discuss the role and realities of accreditation. While several white papers have been circulated regarding accreditation, it was evident that the Commission was still in an information-



Dr. Belle S. Wheelan

gathering stage at the time of the meeting. The committee's final report is due to the Secretary on August 1. A couple of weeks ago, I sent our membership a letter with information gathered by the regional accrediting executives to assist you as you make contacts regarding the value of accreditation and to ensure that we were all singing from the same proverbial song sheet. I encourage you to use the information in your discussions with legislators and others in the position to influence the role of accreditation.

You also know that I have made several staff changes. Each of these has been made with the membership in mind. We are making attempts to use the data we have collected from our off- and on-site committee reports to identify issues affecting our institutions and some redistribution of duties among staff has resulted. While some of the institutions will be assigned new staff members, we are trying to ensure a painless transition process.

We have also had two major committees working to refine our accreditation process. The Principles Review Committee, chaired by Paul Stanton, President of East Tennessee State University, and the QEP Summit Committee, chaired by Elva LaBlanc, President of Galveston College (TX), have been working diligently to clarify and, in some cases, simplify the process. Thanks to all of those who are serving on the committees and to all of you who responded to our call for comments.

I have been visiting institutions, serving as speaker at campus events, and meeting many of the wonderful professionals who support our students across the region. I am heartened by the care and concern each has for their institution and by their diligence in ensuring that quality programs and services are available to students. Thank you for all you do.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS DURING ITS SPRING MEETING

Commission Chair James Barker, President of Clemson University, welcomed four new members to the 13-member Executive Council when it met in session February 25-28, 2006; John Cavanaugh, President of the University of West Florida; Elva Concha LeBlanc, President of Galveston College in Texas; Ernest McNealey, President of Stillman College in Alabama; and Phillip Stone, President of Bridgewater College in Virginia. All four are current elected Commissioners who, as council members, serve on the executive board and represent their respective states in discussions regarding Commission policy and procedure, reports from standing and *ad hoc* committees, and proposals for changes to the standards or the dues formula. The Council has the authority to act for the 77-member Commission when it is not in session.

During its deliberations, the Council took the following actions:

1. Approved the Commission document "The Role of the Chair during the Preliminary Visit." This new document describes the chair's role and responsibilities during an optional preliminary visit to an institution during the reaffirmation review. Such a visit may be requested by the institution or by the Commission staff member in conjunction with the chair of the committee.
2. Approved the "Fifth-Year Interim Report." This revised report expects an institution to report compliance with 12 Comprehensive Standards and one Core Requirement between its decennial reviews. Although institutions report enrollment and financial information annually, the Commission cannot verify an institution's ongoing compliance with the *Principles* during the intervening years between reaffirmations so it developed a form that will be used, in part, to respond to the U.S. Department of Education's expectation that accrediting bodies increase monitoring of their institutions.
3. Approved the new policy "Reimbursement for Third-Party Litigation." This policy allows the Commission to charge copying and delivery costs at a reasonable rate to a member institution to defray costs of compliance with third-party discovery requests.

4. Approved the changed composition of the On-Site Review Committee to include a president in lieu of a second evaluator for the Quality Enhancement Plan.

Other members of the 2006 Executive Council are: Joseph Barwick, Vice Chair of the Commission and President of Carteret Community College in North Carolina; Charles Gould, President of Florence–Darlington Technical College in South Carolina; Charles Lein, President and COO of Stuller, Inc.; Shirley Lewis, President of Paine College in Georgia; Claudia Limbert, President of Mississippi University for Women; Daniel Reneau, President of Louisiana Tech University; Paul Stanton, President of East Tennessee State University; and James Taylor, President of the University of the Cumberlands in Kentucky.

MEMBERSHIP RESPONDS TO THE CALL FOR COMMENT TO THE DRAFT REVISION OF THE *PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION*

The Commission's call for comment to the proposed changes to the *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement* generated 129 responses from a variety of institutions and other constituents, most of whom commended the work of the Principles Review Committee, led by Paul Stanton, President of East Tennessee State University. The comments indicated a high level of satisfaction with the proposed reorganization of the document, the stronger emphasis on integrity, the expanded description of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), and the distinctions in Commission expectations in standards dealing with assessment, library and learning resources, and faculty qualifications. The respondents found that the changes created a more cohesive document, with less redundancy and clearer and more succinct standards.

Among the standards generating the most comments from respondents were those that also were the focus of Committee discussions as the proposal was developed: concerns with redundancy in the areas of institutional effectiveness (CR 2.5, CS 3.3.1, CS 3.4.1) and learning resources (CR 2.9 and CS 3.8.1), and concerns about clarity of expectations in the areas of the QEP (CR 2.12) and faculty qualifications (CS 3.7.1).

Pertaining to the proposed change to Core Requirement 2.5 on institutional effectiveness which places a new emphasis on an institution's mission and goals rather than its programs and services, one respondent stated: "The replacement language used in Core Requirement 2.5 shifts the emphasis of the requirement from programs and services offered by the institution to its mission and goals. The whole point of the requirement is to provide for an effective planning and evaluation process that includes "systematic review" of what the institution is doing. By restricting it to the mission and goals, the accreditation process may be risking the substitution of a narrower based review of progress toward accomplishing the vaguer statements of institutional intent instead of the programs it offers and services available to support that programming." Others applauded the shift of emphasis on programs and services from the Core Requirement to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1. Several institutions encouraged the Committee to revise proposed CS 3.3.1 to include evaluation of research and community/public service only as they apply to the educational mission of the institution.

The proposed elimination of Comprehensive Standard 3.8.1 that would shift the expectation for an appropriate facility from the library section of the *Principles* to the physical resources section elicited strong comments from librarians and library associations: "While I support the move of the phrase 'services' to Core Requirement 2.9, the elimination of the phrase 'facilities' in relation to libraries in CS 3.8.1 does a great disservice to students. . .The library continues to serve students as a learning laboratory, a place for group work and learning. To eliminate a requirement for adequate facilities imperils student learning, in my opinion."

Respondents were split in their reaction to the proposed change to Core Requirement 2.12, QEP. While most supported the revision that more clearly describes what constitutes an "acceptable QEP," others voiced their opposition to eliminating the requirement that the QEP had to be part of an ongoing planning and

evaluation process. “The recommended change suggests the QEP can originate and operate outside institutional assessment and evaluation parameters. CR 2.12 should not divorce the QEP, itself a goal or compilation of goals for improvement of the institution, from the overarching planning and evaluation processes of an institution. The QEP’s assessment and evaluation measures can also run parallel to the institution’s assessment and evaluation processes rather than happening outside their sphere,” voiced one respondent.

The standard for faculty credentials continues to be the most challenging and controversial for institutions and review committees. The 31 institutions submitting comments on the proposed change to move the faculty credential guidelines from Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 of the *Principles* to that of the *Resource Manual* were split. While many applauded the move as clarifying expectations that it is the responsibility of the institution “to maintain faculty quality while providing institutions with greater flexibility in defining their faculty,” others disagreed. In support of retaining the credential guidelines in the *Principles*, one respondent stated: “An education requires an exposure to the full breadth of the field and the student suffers from not having exposure to the full spectrum of information that can only be provided by those who have completed a course of proscribed study for the discipline. Additionally, reducing the rigor or expectations for faculty credentials devalues the degrees for which so many of us have worked tirelessly.” Some feel that the move will reduce the visibility of the historically acceptable qualifications. “Moving the guidelines out of the *Principles* may result in the guidelines being de-emphasized or ignored,” claimed a respondent from Georgia.

The institutions answering the call for comment to the proposed *Principles* were highly representative of the Commission’s membership. Of the 109 institutions responding, 33 were Level I institutions (associate’s degree granting), 13 Level II (baccalaureate degree granting), 22 Levels III-IV (master’s degree granting), and 41 were Levels V-VI institutions (doctoral degree granting).

The Principles Review Committee met on May 15 to consider all comments received to date and to prepare a final report that will be forwarded to the Executive Council and the 77-member Commission on Colleges for their consideration during meetings in June. The document approved by the Commission in June will be forwarded to the membership for final vote during the College Delegate Assembly’s Business Meeting that will be held on Tuesday, December 12, during the 2006 Annual Meeting in Orlando.

In addition to Chair Stanton, other members of the Principles Review Committee are: Walter Bortz, III, President of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia; Joseph Boykin, Dean of Libraries at Clemson University in South Carolina; Mickey Burnim, Chancellor of Elizabeth City State University in North Carolina; Diane Calhoun-French, Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs at Jefferson Community and Technical College in Kentucky; Kent Chabotar, President of Guilford College in North Carolina; Timothy Czerniec, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance at Barry University in Florida; John Pickelman, Chancellor of North Harris Montgomery Community College District in Texas; and Linda Salane, Executive Director of the Leadership Institute of Columbia College in South Carolina.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT SUMMIT STEERING COMMITTEE HOLDS FIRST MEETING

On April 17 the Quality Enhancement Summit Steering Committee, led by chair Elva LeBlanc, President of Galveston College, met to respond to the charge of the Commission’s Executive Council to initiate a focused review of the current status of the newly implemented Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that became a component of the review process for institutions seeking reaffirmation of accreditation. To date 117 institutions have undergone review since the 2001 adoption of the *Principles of Accreditation*, which included the requirement for an acceptable QEP: the 2003 Class of 8 pilot institutions; the 2004 Class of 30 institutions; and the 2005 Class of 79 institutions.

The committee's discussion centered on the following topics: (1) the relationship between the QEP and an institution's planning and evaluation processes; (2) ways to better communicate the vision and purpose of the QEP; (3) the importance of clarifying concepts such as "focus" as they relate to the QEP; (4) the linkage of the evaluation of the QEP to student learning outcomes; (5) ways to provide broad latitude on the focused issue of the QEP; (6) how to determine the acceptability of the QEP Impact Report required of institutions at the fifth-year interim point between decennial reviews; and (7) ways to ensure consistency between what is expected of the institution and how the plan is evaluated by the On-Site Review Committee.

The committee decided to collect information about the strengths and weaknesses of the QEP, the value of Commission materials, and the performance of the On-Site Review Committee from various stakeholders in the peer review process. Questions regarding these topics will be sent to the 2005-2006 accreditation liaisons and QEP directors and their responses will be used as a basis for modifying Commission documents and handbooks.

In addition to Chair LeBlanc, other members of the committee are: Clinton Bristow, President of Alcorn State University in Mississippi; Robin W. Hoffman, President of DeKalb Technical College in Georgia; Patrick Lee, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Barry University in Florida; Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, President of Sweet Briar College in Virginia; Haywood Strickland, President of Wiley College in Texas; and Teresa Summers, Professor in Human Ecology and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM COMMITTEE REVIEWS

During the past 5 months, Commission staff members have analyzed the findings of the Off- and On-Site Review Committees of the 2005 and 2006 reaffirmation classes to identify the accreditation "issues" that have proven to be most challenging to those institutions. Staff reviewed the issues that have surfaced—from type, governance, and size of institution—and have begun to develop workshops that will provide clarification and additional direction to our colleges and universities. (See article "Commission Launches Research Project.")

The research findings indicate that the area most cited for compliance issues is that of *faculty credentials* due largely to institutions providing insufficient documentation for faculty qualifications. In discussion among staff members and committee chairs, committee members continue to judge compliance on credentials, for example, listing that a faculty member must have more than a master's degree and 18 graduate hours. When the Commission approved the move from the *Criteria for Accreditation* to the *Principles of Accreditation*, it removed the **mandate** that a faculty member meet the credential requirements of 18 graduate hours and a master's degree and other credentials specified for teaching at the various degree levels. Instead, those former credential requirements were reclassified as "guidelines" in recognition that there are ways, other than course work, through which a faculty member may be qualified to teach. The *Principles* require an institution the responsibility to make its case for the qualifications of its faculty. While many institutions have chosen to continue to rely on the credentials outlined in the guidelines, the Commission no longer **requires** it.

The second area being addressed by staff is that of *financial reporting*. Toward that end, Donna Barrett, Director of Institutional Finance for the Commission, conducted a workshop for small, private colleges where this seemed to provide the most difficulty. Presidents and chief financial officers from 100 institutions were invited to attend the first workshop. Because the workshop received great reviews, it will be repeated at the Annual Meeting in December 2006. (See article "First Small Private College Initiative a Success.")

Commission staff will continue to explore other accreditation-related issues that could serve as topics for future workshops in order to make every effort to assist institutions in their quest for excellence.

THE COMMISSION LAUNCHES A RESEARCH PROJECT

This past spring, the Commission launched a multi-phased research project focusing on institutions' compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

Phase I of the project involved an analysis of the reports of the 2005 and 2006 Off-Site Review Committees that evaluated 156 institutions. The first step in the project was to examine frequency distributions for each of the 72 requirements (excluding Core Requirement 2.12, Quality Enhancement Plan) and identify the most frequently recurring areas where institutions had not established compliance with the requirement. Data were examined for differences based on institutional level, size, governance structure, and year of review. Based on the first stage of review, staff identified 18 requirements for further content analysis to determine the basis for the Off-Site Committees' findings.

A random sample of Off-Site Committee Reports was drawn for each of the 18 standards for further content analysis. Staff developed a coding system to capture the general themes and issues within the content of the reports. Those coding categories are listed below.

1. **Insufficient Evidence** – Institution lacks correct evidence and/or documentation.
2. **Inconsistent Implementation** – Standard is not implemented wholly.
3. **Further Verification** – Committee needs to review additional documentation in order to determine compliance.
4. **Needs Improvement** – Institution needs to improve on the implementation of the standard.

The analysis of the reports indicated that the most commonly cited reason for non-compliance was "Insufficient Evidence." Examples of reasons why institutions were cited due to "Insufficient Evidence" included:

CS 3.4.1 Institution A:

"As indicated in the Approval Procedures for New Degree Programs and Academic Shared Governance Policy, the institution has a well-articulated and thorough process for demonstrating that the faculty and administration are actively involved in the approval process of academic programs. However, there is no evidence to determine how the institution establishes and evaluates its programs and learning outcomes. For example, in the Natural Sciences plan, course grades are identified as the tool for the assessment. The course grades do not provide information about a specific outcome."

CR 2.8 Institution B:

"The institution's case was not sufficiently compelling. As part of its response, the institution should provide student credit hours produced by full-time and part-time faculty, by undergraduate and graduate/professional levels in each college."

Phase II of the project will focus on the Reports of the Reaffirmation Committee from the On-Site Committees to determine how and to what extent institutions established a case for compliance for those issues previously cited by the Off-Site Review Committees. The project will rely on methods of analysis similar to those used in Phase I.

Phase III of the project will include a closer analysis of the peer review committees as well as the role of the training materials and programs in enabling peer evaluators to arrive at reasoned, informed professional judgments.

The results of the first phases of the project will be presented in various forms to the membership later this year and at the Annual Meeting in Orlando. The results of the study should prove useful to member

institutions as they prepare reaffirmation materials and as valuable background for improving evaluator training.

FIRST SMALL COLLEGE INITIATIVE A SUCCESS

Recognizing that many of the small, private colleges in the membership struggle with the accreditation process, the Commission, under the direction of its President, launched the Small College Initiative (SCI), a series of workshops that will provide information and support in a number of targeted areas related to the accreditation review process.

The SCI launched its first program with financial workshops held on March 28 and 30, 2006, in Atlanta. Fifty-nine institutions sent more than 100 representatives to participate in the program conducted by Donna Barrett, Director for Institutional Finance at the Commission. Discussion centered on financial planning and strategies in the reaffirmation process, common financial problems encountered in peer evaluation, and the development of documentation that supports compliance for financial standards. The workshop did not focus on accounting or technical issues; rather, it emphasized leadership decisions and their impact on institutions' accreditation. Attendees found the sessions to be meaningful and they appreciated the opportunity to be actively engaged in discussing significant issues pertaining to financial stability.

Future workshops in the SCI series will focus on critical areas identified as part of the Commission's new research function that is evaluating common areas on non-compliance among small, private institutions as well as other types of institutions.

COMMISSION DATELINE

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| May 22–23 | Leadership training for new commissioners <i>(by invitation only)</i> |
| June 12 | Leadership Team orientation for 2008 reaffirmation class, Track B <i>(by invitation only)</i> |
| June 20–22 | Summer Meeting of the Commission on Colleges and its Executive Council |
| June 27 | Posted on the Commission's Web site: accreditation actions on institutions taken by the Commission on Colleges on June 22 |
| July 15 | Financial Institutional Profiles due |
| July 30–August 2 | Institute on Quality Enhancement and Accreditation |
| August 7–8 | Leadership training for chairs of review committees <i>(by invitation only)</i> |
| August 21–23 | Appeals Committee hearings <i>(if necessary)</i> |
| September 6 | Monitoring Reports due <i>(as requested by the Committees on Compliance and Reports)</i> |
| September 8 | Compliance Certifications due: 2007 reaffirmation class, Track B |
| October 19 | Workshop for pre-applicant institutions |