

The Importance of Specialized Accreditation

"A Message to Our Publics!"

Reliance on Accreditation

Higher education in America is unique in the world because of its reliance on accreditation to ensure quality and to foster a culture of continued improvement.

The universe of recognized accrediting bodies is generally divided into one group of six regional agencies which accredit colleges and universities as whole institutions, and another group of accrediting bodies which focus on professional, specialized, and special-purpose programs and also free-standing institutions.

In 1993, just before the demise of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), this latter group of accrediting bodies joined together to create ASPA.

The goals of ASPA are:

- to promote quality and integrity in accreditation;
- to address accrediting issues in educational, governmental, and public policy contexts;
- to facilitate collaboration among programs and institutions; and
- to interact collegially with the regional accrediting bodies.

Enhanced Value

ASPA member agencies subscribe to the widely referenced ASPA *Code of Good Practice*. A major focus of interest both to ASPA members and to the regional agencies is in enhancing the value of the accrediting process to the programs and institutions served, as well as to the public.

Strategies for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of accreditation include combined or joint on-site visitations, as described in the resource document *Collaborative Evaluations by Regional and Specialized Accrediting Agencies (Guidelines and Procedures)*. Particularly in the case of those ASPA agency members recognized by the US Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the procedures of the accrediting process are virtually identical to those in effect for the regional bodies. The standards are similarly rigorous, comprehensive, and outcome-based, with specific attention directed to the professional or special-purpose curriculum.

ASPA members include agencies whose history goes back to the very earliest years of accreditation, and whose accrued body of knowledge about assessing education quality provides a useful resource for accreditors serving the spectrum of educational programs

and bodies, as well as for the institutions subject to and served by accreditation processes.

Support is a Good Investment

Members of ASPA appreciate the role of foundations, corporations, and private charities in making possible the survival and growth of American higher education. Matching fund programs, for example, have helped many institutions survive difficult times - and have enabled others to develop new areas of service and innovative approaches designed to make American higher education even more inclusive.

As part of accreditation, institutions and programs must demonstrate their ability to manage broad and complex educational purposes and to balance resources to serve their missions and goals. This means that a program or institution accredited by an ASPA-member accreditor offers a good risk for non-profit and charitable investment. ASPA asserts that well-applied accreditation distinguishes and recognizes quality in many forms and formats of education.

We believe the support of higher education should be viewed expansively, bringing into the universe of recipient institutions those which, through accreditation, demonstrate that they offer programs of quality, designed to help students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become productive members of society.

Further Information

If you would like further information about professional and specialized accreditation and how it serves educational programs and institutions as well as the public, please visit the other sections of the ASPA web site or contact the ASPA office. ASPA will gladly provide contact information for its member agencies.