

Accreditation NOTES

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Degree Mills and Fraudulent Higher Education Credentials/Certifications

Commission President Barbara Beno has been appointed to a group examining the degree mill and higher education, sponsored by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The group's goal is to develop strategies that will help to curb the abuse of degree mills and credential mills in higher education world wide. The remarks below reflect information gained at meetings and from other sources.

World-wide, “degree mills,” or institutions which sell fake higher education degrees and certifications, are proliferating.¹ Accompanying and supporting them are false accrediting bodies, and even bogus entities that “recognize” or certify the fake accreditors. Fraudulent higher education is a multi-billion dollar industry world-wide; curtailing its growth is difficult. While degree mills sell degrees and credentials from fake institutions which look legitimate, they also produce fraudulent degrees from legitimate, accredited institutions.

The proliferation of degree mills is driven by demand. As the economies of the developing world expand, the demand for workers with higher education degrees and credentials has increased faster, it seems, than there are sufficient opportunities to obtain a legitimate higher education. Some demand comes from individuals without access to higher education; most demand comes from individuals who wish to obtain the credentials necessary to obtain jobs or incomes without earning those degrees legitimately. (An example of the latter case is a legislator in an area which WASC accredits who has a bogus doctorate, and requires others to address him as “Doctor.”)

Degree mills are aided by the weak and ineffectual laws of many nations and American states that do not give law enforcement sufficient tools to pursue and prosecute those using fraudulent credentials. Hence, the sellers or holders of fake degrees are not subject to sanction.

The Internet has made it possible for degree mills to do their business electronically, and to “move” their operations when law enforcement comes in pursuit. Since many degree mills that do not operate through the Internet simply rent an office space or a post office box, they can change addresses easily. Some of the most profitable degree mills have moved from state to state within the U.S., just ahead of the law.

Many nations, and some U.S. states, do not have governmental agencies that license legitimate institutions and therefore do not have a means of filtering out the operations of those institutions that are fake or substandard. Therefore, degree mills can proliferate masked as “regular” institutions. Sometimes degree mills can purchase the endorsement or “approval” of government agencies. In one country, a degree mill named St. Regis University was successful in altering governmental processes to gain government “approval” of the institution through

¹ One excellent book on this subject is *Degree Mills: The Billion-Dollar Industry that has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas*, by Allen Ezell and John Bear, 2005, Prometheus Books.

Substantive Changes: What Are They and What is the Approval Process?

Accreditation affirms that an institution has established conditions and procedures under which its mission and goals can be realized and that in fact the institution is accomplishing them. When an institution is accredited, or its accreditation is reaffirmed, it is accredited for conditions existing at the time of that action by the Commission. However, recognizing that institutions are dynamic, Commission policy allows for institutions to report, for Commission review, proposed changes that are substantive in nature.

Although a principle of institutional accreditation is that everything accomplished in the name of the institution is covered by its accreditation, substantive changes are not automatically included. Most changes, such as adding or dropping courses, developing new options that are associated with existing offerings, or changing personnel, are not substantive and are part of the on-going business of institutions. Special programs and off-campus educational activities frequently augment learning options for students.

A substantive change in an institution is one which may significantly affect its nature, quality, objectives, scope, or control. What might be a minor change for one institution may well be a major change for another. The following examples, while not constituting an exhaustive list, are conditions which require a proposal be prepared for the Commission's Substantive Change Committee:

- A change in mission, scope, or name of the institution.
- A change in the nature of the constituency served.

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- A change in the location or geographical area served.
- Opening or closing a college or off-campus location.
- A change in the control of the ownership (including merging with another institution).
- Contracting with a non-regionally accredited organization for that organization to provide courses or programs on behalf of the institution.
- Establishing an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50% of an educational program.
- Offering courses or programs outside the geographic region served by the institution, including international sites.
- Moving to a new location.
- Offering programs at a degree level different from that listed for the institution in the ACCJC online directory.
- The addition of courses or programs (including general education courses) in which 50% or more are offered through a mode of distance or electronic delivery.
- A change in courses or programs that represents a significant departure from current practice (including addition of a new degree or vocational certificate program).
- Offering 50% or more of a degree or certificate program through a mode of distance or electronic delivery or at an additional location geographically apart from the main campus.
- Changing the number of credits required for the completion of a program by 50% or more, or a change from clock hours to credit hours.

These changes, because they may affect the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the total institution, are subject to review by the Commission both **prior to as well as subsequent to implementation**. Institutions have reported loss of federal financial aid when substantive changes were not approved by regional accrediting bodies.

The process for a substantive change review is to first formally communicate to the Commission's substantive change staff (via email or U.S. Postal Service) a description of the proposed change, the need for the change, and the anticipated effects. If the proposed

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Substantive Changes...

change is determined to be substantive, the institution will be asked to complete a Substantive Change Proposal following the required elements in the ACCJC *Substantive Change Manual*, which can be accessed from the ACCJC web site: www.accjc.org.

Commission staff will review the draft for required elements and schedule the institution for a Committee review of the final proposal by the Commission's Committee on Substantive change. A final proposal and college catalog must be mailed, and one copy emailed, to the Commission office staff and the Substantive Change Committee members 30 days prior to the scheduled conference call meeting; staff will provide committee members' mailing addresses and instructions. In each case, the institution remains responsible for the content of the proposal.

The Committee may act to approve the change, deny the change, or refer the proposed change to the full Commission for action at either the January or June Commission meeting. The Committee may also defer action and request additional information about the change or visit the institution prior to its decision. Normally, after the Committee has reviewed and taken action on a Substantive Change Proposal, Commission staff will inform the institution within one week via email, and a formal letter follows within 2 to 4 weeks.

For a complete list of what constitutes a substantive change, instructions regarding the content and format of a Substantive Change Proposal, key considerations and evidence to provide when preparing the proposal, please refer to the *Substantive Change Manual* and the Commission's Substantive Change Policy found in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*, available online.

Institutions are reminded that timely contact with Commission staff as well as timely submission of proposals for change will ensure that institutions are complying with Commission policy.



Higher Education Act Update

The Higher Education Act (HEA) has finally passed both houses of Congress and as of July 15, was still in conference where differences between the two bills will be resolved. It now appears possible that Congress will be unable to complete the legislation in July. Following the August recess, Congress will have only two weeks to work in September before adjourning to campaign. Thus, the HEA may again be extended until the next Congress.

The legislation is very long, over 700 pages, and has many provisions which remain of concern to the higher education community, including extensive new institutional reporting requirements.

On accreditation issues, Congress has expanded the law with regard to a few limited topics: evaluation of distance education, evaluation of institutional success with respect to student achievement, and due process proceedings provided when an accreditor takes action to terminate or withdraw accreditation from an institution. Once the conference process is completed and upon presidential approval, the law requires the Department of Education begin its negotiated rulemaking process with a series of national forums (which provide opportunity for public comment on the legislation and on what should be regulated), the appointment of a negotiated rulemaking team, and the implementation of negotiated rulemaking. The entire process could take up to a year.

Below is a brief summary of changes to Part H of the HEA that address accreditation; portions in quotation marks come directly from the legislation.

Distance Education

The legislation requires agencies that accredit institutions that offer distance education programs to have processes through which the institution establishes that “the student who registers in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit.”

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Higher Education Act...

Standards for Student Achievement

In order to be recognized by the Department of Education, an accrediting agency must ensure that its standards assess an institution's "success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions or programs as established by the institution, including, as appropriate, consideration of State licensing examinations, course completion, and job placement rates." This language generated lengthy negotiations between the six higher education organizations and the accrediting community. All agreed to leave this language intact (despite the fact it was seen as problematic because it used the idea of institutional "standards") and to add rules of construction, which appear later in the Act, to ensure that accreditors' authority and responsibility were not voided.

Due Process for Institutions

Largely as a result of institutions whose accreditation was terminated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), various versions of language were introduced to increase the due process given institutions during adverse actions (defined as denial, termination, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation). The final due process language includes many revisions to language, but nearly all describe current practices of due process shared by regional accreditors and already provided by the ACCJC and WASC appeals processes. One exception is a new addition to the law which would allow an institution one additional opportunity to provide "new" information on fiscal resources if the institution's accreditation has been terminated for want of adequate financial resources.

Religious Mission

Congress inserted language designed to "protect the mission of religious institutions" despite the opposition of the accrediting community. We opposed the language because we believe that we currently apply standards that are fair and are based on American higher education values and practices, which may not align with some faith-based institutions.

Teach-Out Requirements for Institutions

Congress added specific information about how institutions must provide teach-out plans when they lose accreditation or elect to close. These requirements align with current ACCJC policy.

Accreditor Review of Federally Required Information to Students

The HEA now requires that accreditors review the information that institutions are required to give to students and prospective students. This area is one on which ACCJC will work carefully in negotiated rulemaking; we do not want accreditors to have to evaluate this extensive and highly specialized information because it will change significantly our work and workload.

Accreditor Review of Institutional Transfer of Credit Policies

The HEA now requires that accreditors review the information on transfer of credit that institutions provide students and prospective students. This topic is highly controversial in the higher education community; we can expect some rather challenging discussions during negotiated rulemaking. The legislative language is consistent with current ACCJC policy on institutional transfer of credit.

Monitoring Institutional Growth

The HEA now requires accreditors to monitor significant institutional growth in students/enrollments in order to make sure quality is sustained when sudden and rapid growth occurs. This language will also be fiercely debated during negotiated rulemaking as it leaves undefined what "monitoring" is intended to mean and because the high-growth private sector will likely try to limit any interference in institutional growth.

Accreditor's Scope

During the last few years, the accreditors have grown concerned about the Secretary's attempts to regulate (through the Spring 2007 negotiated rulemaking sessions) and to interpret existing law in a manner that dictates what standards an accreditor adopts, or to define standards an accreditor must adopt to evaluate

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Higher Education Act...

student achievement. Historically, while the Secretary has regulated in a manner that required accreditors to have standards, the office has NOT regulated in a manner that described what those standards should be or how they should be applied. Secretary Spellings' many discussions of using graduation rates or time to degree completion as criteria for institutional success led the accreditors and the higher education community to seek some legislative limits on the Department of Education's authority.

Future issues of *Accreditation Notes* will provide updates of any additional changes to language affecting accreditation as the legislation moves from conference to the final vote by Congress, as well as plans for negotiated rulemaking that will follow passage of the Higher Education Act. A more detailed description of legislative language can be found on the President's page of the ACCJC web site: www.accjc.org.

Changes in Commissioners

Newly-selected Commissioners:



Dr. John S. Nixon – Dr. John S. Nixon is the President/CEO of Mt. San Antonio College. Dr. Nixon started his tenure at the College in 2004 as Vice President of Instruction. A 30 year veteran in Education, Dr.

Nixon previously served as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Santa Ana College for 12 years. He also served for a year as Santa Ana's Interim President in 1998 and as Associate Dean of Humanities and Assistant Dean of Continuing Education. As a career educator, Dr. Nixon taught English and English as a Second Language at USC, and at UC Irvine, Santiago Canyon College, and Irvine Valley College. Dr. Nixon has served on the Board of Directors for the Orange County Community Health Care Clinics, the Orange County Chapter of the American Red Cross, and the Orange County Marine Institute. He has held statewide leadership roles, including co-chair of the System Advisory Committee on Curriculum, the statewide Basic Skills Advisory Committee, and as President of the California

Community College Chief Instructional Officers Association. Dr. Nixon holds a B.A. and M.A. in English from UC Irvine, and a Ph.D. in English from USC. Dr. Nixon's service on the Commission began July 1, 2008.

Dr. Patrick Tellei – Dr. Patrick Tellei is the President of Palau Community College. Dr. Tellei formerly served as an Associate Commissioner for Secondary and Post Secondary Education in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands



(CNMI) and as the State Director for Vocational Education in the CNMI Public School System. He also has experience with the public schools systems in Micronesia as well as having taught at the Micronesian Occupational College. His many accomplishments include his service as chair of the Board of Directors of the Palau International Coral Reef Center and vice chair of the Palau Reapportionment Commission. He holds an Ed.D. from the University of San Diego and an M.Ed. from the University of Hawai'i. Dr. Tellei's service on the Commission began July 1, 2008.

Commissioners Selected for a Second Term:

Mr. Steve Bruckman – Representing California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

Ms. Holly Beernink – Representing Independent Colleges

Commissioner Retires:

Ms. Carol Liu – A former member of the California State Assembly from 2000 to 2006, Ms. Carol Liu chaired the Assembly's Higher Education Committee and the Select Committee on Adult Education among others. Ms. Liu formerly served as Mayor of La Cañada/Flintridge. She currently serves as chair of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education Advisory Board and as a member of the Claremont University Consortium Board of Overseers. Ms. Liu began her service on the Commission in June 2007.

New ACCJC Chair and Vice Chair

Professor Lurelean Gaines assumed the role of Chair of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges on July 1, 2008. She is Chair of the Department of Nursing at East Los Angeles College and has also served as the College's Accreditation Liaison Officer. The ACCJC Chair serves a two-year term.

Mr. Floyd Takeuchi was elected to be the Vice Chair of the Accrediting Commission. Mr. Takeuchi, a public member of the Commission, is President and Chief Operating Officer of TransOceanic Media located in Honolulu Hawai'i. This will mark the first time a Commissioner from outside the State of California has served in this position.

Commissioner to be Selected

The Commission is accepting applications to fill two vacant positions on the Commission. Application forms are available from the Commission Office.

Per ACCJC Bylaws, Commissioners are appointed for staggered three-year terms and are limited to two, three-year terms unless the person is elected as an officer for a term which extends beyond a sixth year. In such a case, an additional three-year term may be served.

A Selection Committee will meet this year to fill two Commission vacancies representing the public.

June 2008 Commission Actions on Institutions

At its meeting June 4-6, 2008, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, took the following institutional actions:

Reaffirmed Accreditation

Mendocino College
West Valley College

Granted Initial Accreditation

Woodland Community College

Removed from Warning and Reaffirmed Accreditation

Hartnell College
Porterville College
Western Career College

Removed from Warning

Cuesta College
San Joaquin Valley College

Removed from Probation and Reaffirmed Accreditation

College of Marin
Los Angeles County College of Nursing and Allied Health

Removed from Probation and Placed on Warning

College of the Redwoods

Removed from Show Cause and Placed on Probation

The Salvation Army College for Officer Training at Crestmont

Placed on Warning

Cerritos College
Copper Mountain College
Diablo Valley College
Mission College
Ohlone College
Orange Coast College
Palo Verde College
San Joaquin Delta College

Placed on Probation

Los Angeles Southwest College

Accepted Progress Report with Visit

Berkeley City College
Brooks College
Coastline Community College
College of Alameda
Golden West College
Honolulu Community College
Laney College
Los Angeles Mission College
Merritt College

Continued on Warning

Mira Costa College

Continued on Probation

Lassen College

Continued on Show Cause

Northern Marianas College

Accepted Progress Report

Lake Tahoe Community College
Los Angeles Harbor College
Los Angeles Pierce College
Los Angeles Valley College
Monterey Peninsula College
West Los Angeles College

Accepted Focused Midterm Report

Cypress College
Merced College
West Hills College Coalinga
West Hills College Lemoore

Accepted Focused Midterm Report with Visit

College of the Desert

Accepted Midterm Report

Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising
Fullerton College

Placed on Show Cause
TransPacific Hawaii College

Rejected Focused Midterm Report
Deep Springs College

Rejected Midterm Report and Continued on Warning
Victor Valley College

Substantive Change Actions

Allan Hancock College – Approved to offer degree programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education.

American River College – Approved to offer degree programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education; approved to offer 24 certificate programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education.

Cabrillo College – Approved to offer degree programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education.

Chaffey College – Approved establishment of the Chaffey College Center at Chino.

College of the Canyons – Deferred action on new Canyon Country Education Center.

Heald College – Approved to offer the Associate of Applied Science and Certificate in Paralegal.

Merced College – Approved to offer courses and programs where 50% can be completed at Delhi, Dos Palos, and Mariposa High School sites and at Central California Women’s Facility and Valley State Prison.

Sacramento City College – Approved a partnership to offer a program with Bell Helicopter Training Academy in Fort Worth, Texas.

San Diego Mesa College – Approved the A.S. Degree in Accounting and Business Administration; offering the General Education program through distance education.

Santa Ana College – Approved to offer degree and certificate programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education.

Southwestern College – Approved establishment of a location at Otay Mesa.

West Los Angeles College – Approved to offer degree and certificate programs where 50% or more of each program is delivered through distance education.



June 2008

Commission Actions on Policies

Policies Approved for First Reading:

Consistent with Commission procedures, the following policies have been circulated to ACCJC member institutions and other interested parties for review and comment:

Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems (Adopted June 1999; Revised January 2004) – As part of an ongoing process to review and revise policy, this policy update reflects Commission Standards and current practice in the field.

Policy on Credit for Prior Experiential Learning in Undergraduate Programs (Adopted June 1980; Revised June 1990) – As part of an ongoing process to review and revise policy, this policy update reflects current practice in the field.

Policy on Governing Boards for Military Institutions – The Commission has, within its membership, colleges which have unique board configurations. To recognize and respond to these, the Policy Committee developed and approved this new policy for first reading.

Student Learning Outcomes: Proficiency by 2012

Last year, the Commission developed a Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness to be used by institutions as a tool to measure and evaluate their own effectiveness and by comprehensive evaluation teams to assess the level of college performance in each of three areas: Program Review, Planning, and Student Learning Outcomes. Under each area, the rubric describes the characteristics of institutional performance at four different levels: Awareness, Development; Proficiency, and Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement.

The Commission announced that by Fall 2007, it required member institutions to be at the top level of the rubric in the areas of program review and planning, and at the second level of the rubric in the area of student learning outcomes. The Commission now has determined that it will require member institutions to be at the third level of the rubric, the Proficiency level, on student learning outcomes by fall 2012. This deadline aligns with the Commission's decision in 2002, upon approval of the Standards of Accreditation,

to permit institutions ten years to fully implement the new standards on student learning and assessment of learning. The Commission will continue to examine information about college progress in implementing the standards related to student learning outcomes.

Since the 1990s, the Commission's Standards of Accreditation have expected institutions to have in place systematic and timely processes for program review and other forms of institutional effectiveness assessment, processes for short-term and long-term planning to make institutional improvements, and processes for setting institutional priorities and allocating resources needed to implement institutional plans for improvement. These combined processes were to become the means to continuous quality improvement. The Commission's requirement that institutions now demonstrate performance at the Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement level in the areas of evaluation and planning reflects these long standing accreditation requirements.

Substantive Change Committee Meeting Schedule 2008 – 2009

Meetings are usually held on the 3rd Friday of each month from 2:30 to 4:30 P.M.

For the purposes of scheduling, and for an initial staff determination about the nature of the change in question, it is important to contact Commission staff *before* submitting a substantive change proposal. Institutional proposals for substantive change must be completed according to the requirements as detailed in the *Substantive Change Manual* (www.accjc.org). Every proposal must include supporting materials as detailed in Section VI of the Manual. The Substantive Change Committee reserves the right to return incomplete proposals without review.

Copies of each institutional substantive change proposal along with a college catalog must be mailed directly to each of the members of the Substantive Change Committee (mailing list will be provided). In addition, one electronic copy and one hard copy should be sent to the ACCJC office. Proposals must be received no later than *one month BEFORE* the date of the scheduled meeting.

Dates of Meetings

(subject to change depending on scheduling circumstances)

| <u>Fall 2008</u> | <u>Spring 2009</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| September 19 | February 20 |
| October 17 | April 17 |
| November 14 | May 15 |



ACCJC Fall 2008 Workshops

Each year, ACCJC holds workshops to train evaluators and team chairs who will conduct comprehensive reviews of member institutions as well as workshops for institutions about to begin the process of self study leading to the Self Study Report and comprehensive visit.

Team Training Workshops

Team Training Workshops are held for specific teams of evaluators and require that all team members and chairs attend. This process benefits team development and allows the teams to begin work on the upcoming visit well in advance. Workshops will be held at the locations indicated for the following teams:

September 3, 2008 – Los Angeles – El Camino College, Rio Hondo College, San Bernardino Valley College, and Crafton Hills College

September 4, 2008 – Los Angeles – Contra Costa college, Diablo Valley College, Los Medanos College, American Samoa Community College, and Cuesta College

September 10, 2008 – Oakland – College of the Canyons, Long Beach City College, Santa Ana College, and Santiago Canyon College

Self Study Training Workshops

Self Study Training Workshops will be held this fall for the following institutions preparing for self study and comprehensive review:

September 25, 2008 Irvine Valley College, Saddleback College, and Mt. San Antonio College

September 26, 2008 Moorpark College, Ventura College, Oxnard College, and Antelope Valley College

October 3, 2008 College of Marin

October 10, 2008 San Jose City College and Evergreen Valley College

Other ACCJC Workshops

The following workshops will be held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Community College League of California (CCLC) November 20-23, 2008 in Anaheim, California. Details of the conference are available at the CCLC website at <http://www.ccleague.org>.

Accreditation Liaison Officer Workshop – This workshop will provide training for new and experienced Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs). The purpose of the workshop will be to provide new ALOs the opportunity to understand their role as leaders in building a college culture and practice in which student learning is the focus of attention, thought, and institutional action. It will cover topics such as the role of accreditation, the duties of the ALO, the 2002 Standards of Accreditation, effective program review, the Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness, and the Commission's publications. Experienced ALOs will appreciate the opportunity to update and refresh their skills, ask questions, and share experiences with new ALOs.

Accreditation 101: A Workshop on the Basics of Accreditation – This session is intended for individuals who wish to become more informed about the purposes of regional accreditation, the ACCJC of WASC, and the 2002 Standards of Accreditation. It is also designed to give those who would be interested in serving on an accreditation evaluation team and new team evaluators a basic understanding of the accreditation processes and procedures, how teams are formed and trained, and the team members' responsibilities before, during, and after the site visit.

Accreditation and Leadership: What College Executives Need to Know – This workshop is designed to help college presidents and senior leaders better understand regional accreditation and the responsibilities of college leadership in creating and maintaining institutional effectiveness. It will provide an update on the Higher Education Act and new requirements for accreditors and institutions; recent changes to the Commission's Annual Report form and new Commission monitoring requirements; what constitutes a substantive change; and the Commission's Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness and the Commission's expectations for institutional performance.

ACCJC Sponsored Workshops

Strengthening Student Success – ACCJC is again proud to collaborate with The Research and Planning Group of California (RP Group) and the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges in offering the Strengthening Student Success Conference this fall (October 1-3) in Anaheim. The purpose of the conference is to bring together practitioners to share new ideas and current assessment practices around strengthening student success through the themes of equity, professional learning and development, and student voices. This year's keynote speakers will be **Hunter R. Boylan**, the Director of the National Center for Developmental Education and Professor of Higher Education at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC and **Richard Sterling**, the recently retired executive director of the National Writing Project and adjunct professor of Language and Literacy, Society and Culture at the University of California, Berkeley. See the RP Group website at <http://rpgroup.org> for more information.

Save the Dates!
April 15 – 18, 2009

ACCJC is once again partnering with the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (ACSCU) of WASC to offer a conference in the spring of 2009. ACCJC will have a strand of informative workshops as part of the Academic Resource Conference that has traditionally been held each year by the ACSCU. The Conference will be held at the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel. The last time ACCJC and ACSCU partnered was for the AAHE Conferences.



Comprehensive Visits

Under current U.S. Department of Education regulations, ACCJC must provide opportunity for third-party comment regarding the institutional qualifications for accreditation. The institutions noted below are scheduled to undergo comprehensive visits in the fall of 2008, and the spring and fall of 2009, and review by the Commission at its January 2009, June 2009, and January 2010 meetings. Third-party comment on these institutions should be made to the ACCJC President, Dr. Barbara A. Beno, at 10 Commercial Blvd. Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949. For consideration, such comment must be made in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and received no later than five weeks before the scheduled Commission meeting.

Fall 2008

(for Jan. 2009 Commission Review)
American Samoa Community College
College of the Canyons
Contra Costa College
Crafton Hills College
Cuesta College
Diablo Valley College
El Camino College
Long Beach City College
Los Medanos College
Rio Hondo College
San Bernardino Valley College
Santa Ana College
Santiago Canyon College

Spring 2009

(for June 2009 Commission Review)
Berkeley City College
Butte College
College of Alameda
College of the Marshall Islands
East Los Angeles College
Laney College
Los Angeles City College
Los Angeles Trade-Technical College
Merritt College
Palomar College
Pasadena City College
Santa Rosa Junior College

Fall 2009

(for January 2010 Commission Review)

American River College
Chabot College
Citrus College
Cosumnes River College
Folsom Lake College
Las Positas College
Napa Valley College
National Polytechnic College of Science
Sacramento City College
Santa Barbara City College
Southwestern College
Taft College

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Degree Mills...

the Education Ministry. Its strategy was cash payments to government officials.²

Of particular credibility in this industry is any degree that purports to be from the United States or from another of the developed nations with established higher education systems. Degree mill operators make liberal use of the names of legitimate institutions and create degrees, web pages, institutional logos, letterhead, and other artifacts that mimic the legitimate institution. One such example is the “University of Berkeley” with gold and blue school colors and a crest or logo familiar to many northern Californians. It plays on the world’s lack of knowledge that the name of the famous university at Berkeley is the University of California, Berkeley. Because legitimate entities entitled “The American University of (place name)” exist throughout the world (these were American style institutions founded by missionary educators bringing U.S. higher education to the world; some are accredited by regional accreditors), faked versions of the “American University of ____” have been successful in selling degrees worldwide. The ACCJC “met” one such organization (the American University of Maui) after a member college inquired about its operation in Southeast Asia.

Allen Ezell and John Bear, in their book *Degree Mills: the Billion Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas*, estimate the size of the American/North European diploma mill industry at annual sales of 200,000 degrees per year. They estimate 10,000 degrees are sold to government employees each year.

Fake foreign degrees also offer opportunities for profit and abuse. Accredited institutions in America typically rely on foreign credential evaluation agencies to establish the legitimacy and comparability of foreign degrees in considering transfer of credit or admission to a degree program. While there are legitimate experts upon whom institutions can rely, there are also fake credential evaluation agencies. Foreign credential evaluation services are unregulated in the United States, so fake agencies can work with impunity. Bo-

² St. Regis University has been investigated by law enforcement as well as by physics Professor George Gollin of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, who works to track and expose degree mills. The “university” had mail drops in 18 states and 25 countries. See also “Diploma Mill Concerns Extend Beyond Fraud”, the New York Times, Sunday, June 29, 2008.

gus off-shore institutions partner with fake credential evaluation agencies to convince legitimate institutions to accept the credits or degrees.

The damage done by degree mills is quite enormous. A relatively minor harm is the estimated \$300 million per year paid to undeserving individuals for salary raises and pension increases obtained with fake degrees. Of more significance is the cost in lives of those treated by individuals with fake medical, oncology, or alternative medicine degrees. There are many documented cases of individuals operating in developing nations with fake medical degrees, but there are also many cases of fake physicians operating in the United States. Beyond medicine, other professions are affected. Fake engineers have built collapsing structures; fake educators have jobs as professors and school teachers, perpetuating poor education; fake pharmacologists invent and sell “cures” for illnesses such as cancer, arthritis, etc. Virtually any profession where an advanced degree is required has cases of fraudulent degree holders; the more high paying the profession, the more enticing to those who commit fraud.³

Solutions

Higher education institutions, employers, governments, organizations, state or governmental licensing boards, and others need to ensure that the individuals they hire, admit for study, use to provide services, or promote in salary or responsibilities have legitimate credentials from legitimate institutions. In many instances, this assurance means that the higher education institution, employer, or government licensing board must require that the institutions awarding degrees or credits send sealed transcripts and diplomas directly to the college, employer, or government licensing board. In turn, the college, employer or board must then verify that the sealed transcript is indeed legitimate. While these checks take time and effort, higher education institutions and employers should take the needed time to ensure legitimacy of the credentials individuals bring to the institution or the job.

Another solution is to develop electronic databases or registries of acceptable quality assurance agencies and institutions reviewed and accredited by them.

³ This information is from a presentation entitled “Concerning the Suppression of Diploma Mills: Case Studies” by Dr. George Gollin to the CHEA-UNESCO group on diploma mills in March 2008.

are a few available now; more are under development.

- The US Department of Education maintains a web site that lists all recognized accrediting bodies in the United States and the institutions they accredit domestically. Accreditors must undergo Department recognition processes to be included on the web site. <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.asp>
- The Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) maintains a directory of member agencies and the institutions they accredit. Accrediting agencies must obtain CHEA recognition to be listed, along with their member institutions, on this web site. www.CHEA.org
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has developed a web portal that offers “access to online information about higher education institutions recognized or otherwise sanctioned by competent authorities in participating countries.” The web site can be used by students in conjunction with other sources of information to identify institutions that are likely to be legitimate institutions for the purpose of enrolling in campus-based or distance education. It currently lists institutions in Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Norway, United Kingdom, and the United States of America. <http://portal.unesco.org/education/>
- The European nations that have signed onto the Bologna Process have created a European Network for Quality Assurance and developed a European Registry that lists the institutions and the quality assurance agencies that have met the necessary criteria to be included in the registry. www.ENQA.org
- The American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) provides a Foreign Education Credential Service that will evaluate foreign transcripts and courses. It has also published a book, *Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents*, designed to help institutions detect bogus institutions and bogus documents. www.aacrao.org

Education and Exposure

Degree mills are a bit like creatures of the night; they shrink back when exposed to light and move else-

where. The legitimate higher education community can play a crucial role by demonstrating good practice in its own review of credits, transcripts, and degrees that prospective students and employees bring to the institution and by developing policies that sanction the use of fake credentials and provide real, negative consequences for those who use them. Higher education must articulate a meaningful message of good practice regarding transcripts and degrees/diplomas to their business and governmental communities so that they too sanction the use of fake education credentials. The State of Oregon has passed laws that make it a crime to use fake credentials. The Oregon Office of Degree Authorization of the Oregon Student Assistance Commission goes beyond enforcing its laws, practicing a policy of exposing users and suppliers of fake credentials. More states could and should follow suit.

Accreditor Actions

Legitimate accrediting or quality assurance agencies can vocalize the need to ensure the validity and legitimacy of transcripts and degrees. They can provide their member institutions with lists of reliable sources of directory information on institutions, of foreign transcript evaluation agencies, and of accrediting or quality assurance agencies that are legitimate. Accreditors can spread the word when fake transcripts and diplomas are uncovered in their institutions, but should do so exercising appropriate cautions and with legal guidance.

The ACCJC and its member institutions have experienced the use of fraudulent degrees and transcripts in the Western Region. The ACCJC has long required institutions to insure the legitimacy of degrees held by employees through audit of personnel records in preparation for Self Study. In some parts of the WASC region, legitimate validation of foreign degrees/credentials is critically important to assuring quality.

The ACCJC is committed to expanding its efforts to educate member institutions and the public about degree mills through education and by providing references to legitimate transcript evaluation services. The Commission will be compiling a list of acceptable foreign credential evaluators for our member institutions. Future issues of *Accreditation Notes* will feature more information on the efforts of other entities, national and international, to curb degree mills.



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