

The ACCSCT Standard

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Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 ACCSCT Petitions for Re-recognition
- 3 Executive Director's Report
- 4 ACCSCT Announces Member Forums
- 5 Chairman's Corner
- 7 Commission Publishes Monograph Series Brochure
- 7 *Career Education Review* Interviews Dr. Michale McComis
- 8 ACCSCT Issues *Accreditation Alert*
- 9 2009 Accreditation Workshop Schedule

ACCSCT Petitions for Re-recognition from U.S. Department of Education

By Leah Matthews, Director of Institutional Compliance and Agency Recognition

This year, ACCSCT will file its Application for Continued Recognition from the U.S. Department of Education ("Department") in order to maintain our status as a recognized national accrediting agency. According to the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*, accrediting agencies desiring to be recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education must formally apply for recognition and must demonstrate their compliance with the *Criteria for Secretarial Recognition (34 CFR Part 602)*. Plans are now in place to ensure that ACCSCT's 2009 Application for Continued Recognition submission will demonstrate the Commission's ongoing compliance with the recognition criteria, and will underscore ACCSCT's commitment to the assessment of educational quality, student achievement, and institutional effectiveness.

Current Recognition Cycle

The Commission's current period of recognition was considered by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) in December 2004. At that time, the Department's Staff Analysis found that ACCSCT complied fully with the recognition criteria without any findings of noncompliance. Upon review of ACCSCT's Petition and the Department's Staff Analysis, NACIQI recommended, and the Secretary granted ACCSCT re-recognition for a full five year period, the maximum period available for re-recognition.

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ACCSCT Petitions for Re-recognition *-continued from previous page-*

In June 2005, the Commission submitted a Petition for the Expansion of Scope of Recognition to include the review and approval of programs at the master's degree level, and appeared before NACIQI at the December 2005 meeting in support of this petition. NACIQI recommended, and the Secretary concurred that ACCSCT should be granted an expansion of scope to include master's degree level programs.

Currently, the Department lists the Commission's scope of recognition as the accreditation of private, postsecondary, non-degree and degree-granting institutions in the United States, including those granting associate, baccalaureate, and master's degrees that are predominantly organized to educate students for occupational, trade, and technical careers, including institutions that offer programs via distance education.

Higher Education Opportunity Act

Although the Accreditation Provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (PL 110-315) may not result in changes to the recognition criteria in time to coincide with ACCSCT's Petition for Recognition, the Commission is undertaking a careful review of the accreditation provisions within the HEOA and will undertake revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* as necessary. Areas of these provisions under review by the Commission include due process when considering adverse actions based solely on financial issues, authenticating distance education student participation, and monitoring enrollment growth at our accredited member schools.

Systematic Program of Review

Accrediting agencies must maintain a systematic program of review that demonstrates that its accreditation standards are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education provided by accredited institutions and relevant to the educational and training needs of students. Pursuant to this recognition requirement, the Commission has begun a comprehensive review of its *Standards of Accreditation* that will involve a survey of accredited institutions, faculty, current students, graduates, and employers. An important part of this review process will include an examination of the Commission's system for determining its graduation and employment benchmarks, its data collection methodology, and its development of quantitative student achievement standards. The Commission has engaged Dr. Peter Ewell from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to undertake this review and to provide the Commission with an external assessment of its accreditation standards and procedures. Dr. Ewell's research has focused on assessing institutional effectiveness and evaluative processes with particular emphasis on student outcomes. More details regarding this project will be forthcoming to accredited members and other interested parties via *The Standard* and on the Commission's website, www.accsct.org.

If you have any questions on the re-recognition process, please contact Leah Matthews, Director of Institutional Compliance and Agency Recognition at lmattthews@accsct.org or 703.247.4512.



Executive Director's Report

By Michale S. McComis, Ed.D.

While I have written articles many times before for a variety of ACCSCT publications, this is my first as the Executive Director. As you probably have become aware by now, the Commission appointed me to serve as ACCSCT's new Executive Director effective December 1, 2008, continuing my 14 year tenure with the organization. When asked why I had put my name forward for the Executive Director position my answer was simple: I believe that we have more work to do to make ACCSCT even better than it is today and I think/hope that I can contribute meaningfully to that improvement process. ACCSCT has come a long way during my tenure with the organization and we have improved ourselves time and again in an effort to ensure that ACCSCT is regarded as a leader in the higher education accreditation community. But, while we have garnered much success, our work is not yet over.

I recently attended the Annual Meeting of the Council of Higher Education Accreditation where Stanley Ikenberry, President Emeritus of the University of Illinois, addressed the question, "Where do we take accreditation?" Dr. Ikenberry concluded that change is natural and necessary and that in his view accreditation "has the capacity to change in response to changing circumstances." Just as change is natural and necessary in higher education and accreditation in general, so too is it a natural and necessary part of ACCSCT and the organization's continued trajectory of success. I believe that ACCSCT is an excellent organization with a group of dedicated and highly capable Commissioners and tenured staff that has much to be proud of. However, the evolution of improvement is not a static process. So, as I have transitioned into my role as Executive Director, I have asked the question: "Where do we take ACCSCT?" My vision for this next year revolves around answering that question and taking time to reflect on what we do well as an organization and how we can be better. Accordingly, ACCSCT is currently examining our processes and procedures, our standards, and our organization as a whole as a means to ensure that we will continue to meet our mission and provide high level accreditation services for our member schools and the students that we collectively serve. It is also important for us to focus not only on our internal operations but also on maintaining current and establishing new positive external relationships with our many constituents in order to ensure that we are able to sustain and enhance our respected position in the higher education community.

ACCSCT as an organization will not only need to continually do its own self-evaluation and strive for improvement but will also need to continue to rely on the relationships and partnerships formed with its member institutions. Accreditation is an enterprise uniquely suited to the concepts of peer review assessment and self-regulation and we are fully aware that we cannot operate successfully as an organization without our volunteers. To that end we will continue to need your help and your willingness to commit your time, energy, and expertise to the success of our endeavor. By working together we can achieve the one key goal that inextricably binds ACCSCT to its membership – student success.

I look forward to many years of service to the ACCSCT community and to working together with all of our accredited member schools.

Michale can be reached via email at mccomis@accsct.org or via telephone at 703.247.4520.

ACCSCT Announces Series of Member Forums

ACCSCT's recently appointed Executive Director, Dr. Michale McComis, has announced that a series of Member Forums will be held across the country in 2009. During these Member Forums, Michale will discuss the Commission's initiatives and his vision for the future. Participants are encouraged to bring questions, ideas, and suggestions regarding the Commission as well as new directions for the career college sector.

There is no fee to attend any of the Member Forums, however, we do ask that you pre-register. Also, the established end times for the forums are estimated as Michale plans to spend as much time as is necessary with those in attendance.

Simply click on any of the Member Forums below to launch ACCSCT's online registration portal for that event. For additional information, please contact Kerry Lambert, Conference and Events Manager, at 703.247.4527 or via email at klambert@accsct.org.

2009 Member Forum Schedule

February 19, 2009

Gemological Institute of America
Carlsbad, California
10:30 am – 12 noon

February 23, 2009

UTI – Avondale, Arizona
Avondale, Arizona
10:30 am – 12 noon

March 19, 2009

Hyatt Regency Riverwalk
San Antonio, Texas
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Reception to follow)
Held in conjunction with an Accreditation Workshop

April 2009

Chicago, Illinois
Dates and location to be determined (please check the ACCSCT website for updates)

May 22, 2009

Ritz Carlton
San Juan, Puerto Rico
11:30 am – 12:30 pm

***This forum to be held in conjunction with an Institutional Enhancement Seminar**
The seminar will be held primarily in Spanish and is reserved first for school members from Puerto Rico.*

Chairman's Corner – A Call to Action

By Paul Bott, Ed.D.



The end of the first decade of the new century finds the for-profit sector of higher education in an interesting situation. There is a new federal act that is friendlier to schools than the last one, and an economic situation that compels more people to seek career-related education. But the sector still has some vocal and influential detractors. These detractors have had an influence beyond their reach, largely because the sector has not acted with a united front to dispel their rhetoric. The reasons for this are myriad and complicated, but there is no better time than now to begin a concerted effort to reinforce the educational missions of for-profit schools and begin to build the basis for improved relationships with communities and states. Your accrediting agency and fellow members stand ready to assist in this endeavor, but the effort will only be successful if the members become more involved at all levels in the community and with the organization.

In the booklet "Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards," Richard Ingram (2009) itemized 10 responsibilities for nonprofit boards, several of which I would like to discuss in the context of ACCSCT the organization and ACCSCT the Commission (your elected and appointed representatives). ACCSCT the organization serves two masters: the membership and the United States Department of Education (DE). ACCSCT the Commission exists to serve the membership, the organization, and through the organization, the Department of Education. The functions of the Commission sometimes appear to conflict with these masters. For example, one role of the Commission is to *determine the organization's mission and purpose*, a role that is dictated by the membership. The DE reviews that role in the process of authorizing the Commission to serve as an institutional accreditor, but they do not challenge the mission or purpose, and they review our authorization documentation in light of them. The organization is required to comply with the standards set by the DE for recognition as an accrediting agency, criteria that are the same for all types of accreditation. The recognition criteria are designed to insure that the standards we set provide for a minimum level of quality through implementation of and compliance with specified processes and practices. The schools' meeting those standards through accreditation determines whether students are eligible to receive Federal financial aid.

Because accreditation agencies serve both their membership and the Department of Education, they are placed squarely in the middle of a dichotomy: looking out for the interests of the membership while also complying with the government's criteria. Those interests do not necessarily have to work against each other: schools (at least in the for-profit sector) have a financial incentive for all of their students being successful and completing program requirements so they may realize all of the tuition revenue. The government, through the accrediting agencies, has some assurance that the funds it provides for students are being used as intended. But accreditation is and should be viewed as more than a compliance function. Accreditation has evolved over the years to provide a turn-by-turn roadmap to good school operation – practices that have been honed by years of contribution of the membership through your elected Commissioners. Providing that roadmap is the extent of the organization's effort: it is up to the school to choose the vehicle, decide how fast or carefully to drive, and who to take along for the trip. Accreditation really is in the best interest of all parties.

One of the most important roles of the Commission is *to enhance the organization's public image*. ACCSCT the organization has a stellar reputation in the larger accreditation community

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Chairman's Corner – A Call to Action *-continued from previous page-*

and with the Department of Education. Despite the enormous steps in the last few years and the positive exposure the for-profit sector received in the debate surrounding the development and passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the sector itself is still seen by many lawmakers, traditional higher education personnel, and much of the general public, in the shadow of the light cast nearly a generation ago by the disgraceful practices of a few schools.

The accrediting associations or agencies, by virtue of their non-profit IRS status, are severely constrained from participating in any activity that could be considered lobbying or advocacy on behalf of the sector. We are generally limited to an educational or consultative function when dealing with governmental agencies without jeopardizing our tax status and/or violating the USDOE recognition criteria. This restriction does not apply to the accredited members of the organization. Nearly all of the membership can engage in activities whose purpose is to change or affect policy or legislation. Advocacy can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including through state associations, by organizing and participating in efforts to educate and inform local and state legislators, and by inviting the media into the schools. Every school has success stories, every school serves a unique population, and every school markedly changes the lives of their graduates – people who get jobs, earn income, pay taxes, and otherwise contribute to the community. For many students, the only chance of getting educated for a career is in our schools. The stories of these individuals are the only things that are going to change the policy makers' views of this sector. Except in limited instances, these stories are not being told to the audiences who still see the sector in a dark light, or the stories are being told only to others in the sector – preaching to the choir. It is vital that the sector embark on a concerted effort to inform and influence the people who make the decisions that affect schools and students.

Another way in which the membership can become involved in enhancing the image of the sector is to become involved with the activities of the Commission. There are numerous opportunities to provide expertise and to influence the direction of the commission, including serving as a visiting team leader or on one of the several *ad hoc* committees of the Commission. Everyone who has served in these capacities reports that it has been one of the best professional experiences they have had and that the experience helped them develop better practices for their own institution. If you are interested in serving in any of these roles, please discuss it with any Commissioner or let the Executive Director know.

Finally, the negotiated rule-making process for the Higher Education Opportunity Act is in progress. Only one section of the rules deals directly with accreditation, and it is the only section that the Commission will be commenting on along with our colleagues from other accrediting organizations. The remainder of the rule-making process deals with operational and fiscal portions of the act such as lending and financial aid. These are areas that the membership, large and small schools alike, needs to pay particular attention to and provide input to the committees the DE has formed.

It would be tempting and easy to relax in the lull that follows the implementation of the Higher Education Opportunity Act and just wait to see what transpires. Please do not do that. Despite ACCSCT's organizational stature, it is incumbent on the membership to promote the sector and the good it does to lawmakers and the general public. Join your colleagues in an effort to influence the status of the for-profit sector of higher education by actively sharing your successes and needs with your state and local policy makers.

Ingram, R.T. (2009). *Ten basic responsibilities of nonprofit boards*. (2nd Ed.) National Center for Nonprofit Boards, Washington: DC.

ACCSCT Publishes Monograph Series Brochure: Learning Resource Systems

In January 2009, the Commission published the 4th monograph in a series that focus on topics critical to institutional success. The 4th monograph entitled *Learning Resource Systems* explains the importance of a comprehensive learning resource system and provides information to assist institutions examine, establish, implement, integrate, and evaluate their learning resources. The monograph begins with a focus on developing an understanding of a learning resource system and provides rationale as to why a learning resource system is a critical component to an institution's efforts to support the students' educational experience.

The ACCSCT Monograph Series is designed to provide guidance on some of the more critical areas of ACCSCT accreditation and to provide guidance to ACCSCT-accredited schools in the cycle of continuous performance improvement, self-evaluation, and self-improvement processes and practices. Through the ACCSCT Monograph Series, the Commission hopes to help our accredited schools to comply fully and accurately with the *Standards of Accreditation*, achieve institutional success, and ensure that students are well prepared to enter the workforce.

The following monographs are currently online and available to download in a full-color PDF file. Click on the links below to download a PDF version of the ACCSCT monographs:

- [Learning Resource Systems](#)
- [Faculty Improvement Planning / Implementation](#)
- [Self Evaluation Processes and Practices](#)
- [Institutional Assessment and Improvement Planning / Implementation](#)

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Career Education Review Interviews Dr. Michale McComis, ACCSCT Executive Director

The *Career Education Review (CER)*, a twice-monthly publication which offers extensive coverage of the career college sector, has published an interview with ACCSCT's Executive Director, Dr. Michale McComis in its January 2009 edition. The *CER* article "New Leadership at ACCSCT" is based on an interview with Dr. McComis and highlights:

- the challenges facing the accreditation community,
- the evolution of accreditation,
- the unique characteristics of ACCSCT accreditation, and
- the importance of strong leadership in career education.

[Click Here](#) to download a PDF version of the interview with Dr. Michale McComis.

More information on the Career Education Review can be found online at <http://www.workforce-com.com/cer/>

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ACCSCT Issues *Accreditation Alert*, Revises *Standards of Accreditation*

On December 31, 2008, ACCSCT issued an *Accreditation Alert* that includes several announcements, as well as revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* in the following areas:

- *Schools to Be Considered List* for the February 2009 Meeting Available Online
- *Eligibility Criteria – Section I, Rules of Process and Procedure*
- *Application for Accreditation – Section II, Rules of Process and Procedure*
- Accreditation Fees

[Click Here](#) to download a PDF version of the December 31, 2008 *Accreditation Alert*

Accredited institutions and others maintaining a complete and up-to-date copy of the *Standards of Accreditation* should add this notice to their current standards book under the *Accreditation Alerts* tab.

Additionally, the published version of the *Standards of Accreditation* available at www.accsct.org has been revised as of January 1, 2009. All provisions of the *Standards of Accreditation*

[Click Here](#) to download a PDF version of the revised *Standards of Accreditation*

Please check the Commission's website regularly for announcements and be sure to keep your contact e-mail up to date using the ACCSCT Annual Report Portal. Beginning in 2009, the Commission will begin to send more correspondence electronically and will rely on the e-mail address provided in each institution's Annual Report.

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Commission Announces 2009 Accreditation Workshop Schedule

For schools seeking initial or renewal of accreditation from ACCSCT, the accreditation process begins with attendance at an Accreditation Workshop where the Commission provides training and resources which will assist schools as they strive towards a meaningful self-evaluation and on-site evaluation experience. The Accreditation Workshops also provide an opportunity for participants gain a better understanding of the Commission's standards and procedures, as well as to share experiences with other schools that will be undergoing an accreditation evaluation.

For schools seeking initial or renewal of accreditation, attendance at the Accreditation Workshop is mandatory. According to the *Standards of Accreditation*, "the full-time, on-site director or appropriate management team representative of the school must attend an accreditation workshop prior to the submission of the application for accreditation." Schools currently accredited by ACCSCT will be assigned to an Accreditation Workshop based upon their scheduled renewal date. Initial applicants and representatives from ACCSCT-

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accredited institutions that are not currently seeking renewal of accreditation may elect to attend any of ACCSCT's Accreditation Workshops.

Date	Location	Registration
March 19-20, 2009	San Antonio, Texas	Click Here to Register
July 9-10, 2009	San Francisco, California	Click Here to Register
September 24-25, 2009	Arlington, Virginia	Click Here to Register
December 3-4, 2009	Washington, DC	Click Here to Register

For more information on the Accreditation Workshop, or any of ACCSCT's professional development activities, please contact Kerry Lambert, Conference and Events Manager at 703.247.4527 or via email at klambert@accsct.org.