

Preface

Within the past several years, the traditional guidelines for recognition of accrediting agencies by the U.S. Secretary of Education have changed.

The Higher Education Directory (HED) makes use of accreditation at four points: (a) selection of institutions to be listed; (b) noting the institutional accreditation and accredited programs within each institution listing; (c) providing a listing of accrediting agencies with names, addresses, etc.; (d) index of accreditations.

Before 1998, HED had relied on the recognition of accrediting agencies by the U.S. Secretary of Education to identify accrediting agencies whose actions are used in these four ways.

The Secretary (or the predecessor, the Commissioner of Education) has recognized accrediting agencies since 1952. From the beginning the recognition has been limited by statute to those agencies whose accreditation was used for Federal purposes. For the first forty years the interpretation of “Federal purposes” was expansive: the use of a list of institutions or programs to advise service members, or the possibility of future need for a list of accredited programs was sufficient to allow an agency access to the recognition process. In that period the recognition criteria were phrased in general terms of good practice. As a result the Federal list came to include almost all legitimate accrediting agencies, both agencies that accredited institutions and agencies that accredited programs.

With the passage of the 1992 amendments to the Higher Education Act the Congress introduced two significant changes of policy: (a) Federal recognition was restricted to those agencies whose accreditation was used to establish institutional eligibility for participation in federal programs; (b) the Secretary was obliged to place in the criteria for recognition a number of requirements of recognized accrediting agencies focused squarely on the administration of Federal student financial aid.

As a result a number of well-established, legitimate accrediting agencies were excluded from Federal recognition. In practice, the Secretary has dropped these from the list as their terms of recognition have expired. In each case the agency has received a letter from the Secretary emphasizing that this action does not reflect on the quality or integrity of the agency’s activities, but is a result of the statutory changes in the understanding of “Federal purposes” for recognizing accrediting agencies. Since the “Federal purpose” is restricted to agencies accrediting institutions, the agencies dropped from the list are those accrediting programs exclusively. For example, among them are the agencies dealing with programs in architecture, in library and information studies, and in business (including graduate programs in business administration.)

From the start of the publication HED relied on the federal list. This reliance and the changes in the federal recognition criteria led to the elimination from the HED listings of programs accredited by the accrediting agencies dropped from the Secretary’s recognition. Thus, well known institutions were not shown as having an accredited program in architecture or business administration, while others were not shown as having accredited programs in library and information studies; yet in many cases the programs were among the premier programs in their disciplines.

HED seeks to be both a comprehensive and an accurate guide to higher education and HED has sought to identify reliable recognition of accrediting agencies other than that of the Secretary of Education. Beginning in 1975 the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation conducted a well-respected recognition process for accrediting agencies, and published a list of the agencies, both institutional and programmatic, that it recognized. From 1975 through the dissolution of COPA in 1993 there was substantial overlap of the COPA list and the Federal list. After 1993 the COPA recognition process was continued by the Commission on the Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA).

The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), formed in 1996, now conducts recognition reviews based on its recognition policies and procedures. The recognition provisions deal with matters of good practice, and do not include the specific Federal student aid provisions now in the federal regulations. This is a two-tier process: an accreditor is first reviewed for its eligibility for CHEA recognition and, if the accreditor is deemed eligible for a recognition review, it then submits material for recognition consideration. Sixty (60) accreditors are recognized by CHEA as of 2007. CHEA eligibility and recognition standards are contained in the CHEA *Recognition of Accrediting Organizations: Policy and Procedures* (2006, revised), available on the CHEA website at www.chea.org.

In this edition, HED has used the Secretary's list, supplemented by the most recent COPA/CORPA/CHEA list for agencies that accredit only programs within accredited institutions. Reference has been made to the Secretary's list of earlier years to identify agencies that were recognized and have been dropped because of the eligibility change noted above. No accreditation by an agency not recognized by either the Secretary or COPA/CORPA/CHEA has been included.

A footnote for clarity: some agencies, especially in the health sciences, accredit both programs within institutions and institutions whose sole program is the accredited program. Such agencies continue to meet the Secretary's eligibility requirements and many are on the Secretary's list although they are primarily program accrediting agencies. The agencies dropped from the Secretary's list are those that accredit programs only, and for the most part require a program to be within the offerings of an already-accredited institution.

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