

# Time to Be Smarter About Accreditation

By Catherine V. Palmer

**A**ccreditation is not about counting hours and audiometers. Accreditation is a process of thoughtful reflection from an academic program about the programs' goals, methods of achieving those goals, and mechanisms of measuring achievement of the goals. For instance, if one goal is for the graduating student to be able to provide treatment for hearing loss, the program must demonstrate how this competency is measured. Indicating that the student spent 40 hours in a clinic where hearing loss was treated would not be sufficient to demonstrate that this student is competent. The process of articulating a program's goals can be a very worthwhile exercise, and can help focus the resources of the program and outcome assessment. Focused resources create efficient programs, and efficiency is critical in a time of economic distress.

An outstanding accreditation agency provides the leeway for programs to use different methods to create independent audiologists competent in the scope of practice upon graduation, yet sets a standard that ensures similar outcomes across programs regardless of the method that leads to competence. Meeting this standard upon graduation is critical to the profession's standing with state licensure boards and other professions. The Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education

(ACAE) has created this type of flexible, yet rigorous, accreditation program.

Accreditation agencies are in the unique position to provide a value-added service to the programs that participate. The ACAE has chosen to create an environment of supportive accreditation where we are all on the same side—wanting to continually upgrade our educational programs to meet the highest possible standard. This is a radical departure from the punitive accreditation system that many professions have become accustomed to. The ACAE is provided in a Web-based format so programs benefit from having their data at their fingertips throughout the year, and, perhaps most importantly, are in a position to update data on an ongoing basis as opposed to trying to collect endless data right before the accreditation report is due. In addition, data from many programs can be combined, without identities being revealed, so programs can benchmark themselves against similar programs (same size, etc.). ACAE is also committed to act as a resource that allows programs to share creative teaching methodologies, assessment tools, and best practices in instruction and learning. Although it may be tempting to reject starting a new accreditation process at a time when budgets are being reduced, this is precisely the time to be smarter about accreditation, and to invest in

accreditation that adds value to the program and is not an exercise in gathering data for the moment.

It is safe to say that the majority of Academy members believe that education is critical to the success of our profession. This has been demonstrated repeatedly as we witnessed a grassroots cry for transforming the profession by introducing the AuD. Accreditation is the underpinning of education in any profession. Accreditation sets the bar for the educational programs and ensures that competent students graduate and enter the profession. It is time to take the next step and make certain that the accreditation of our AuD programs is not only appropriate, but that the accreditation process benefits and improves our programs. The ACAE is uniquely positioned to do this because of the competency-based nature of the accreditation and the value-added processes available to programs. **AT**

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