

The Truth About Recognition of Accrediting Agencies by the U.S. Department of Education

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Recently, the State of Maryland approved legislation updating the licensure requirements for audiologists to the doctoral level. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) posted a press release on their forum voicing their support for this legislation. In addition, the press release included the following statements: “ASHA worked closely with the Maryland Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the Maryland Licensure Board, providing

true statement; the ACAE is not recognized by either the USDE or CHEA. However, this sentence appears to imply that this recognition is necessary for an agency to be an accrediting body. This is not true. Let’s clarify the role of the USDE and the recognition process for accrediting agencies.

The USDE does not directly accredit universities or academic programs. Instead the USDE defers that responsibility to independent, non-governmental agencies. However, the Secretary of Education is required to determine which agencies are “reliable authorities as to the quality of education or training provided by the institutions of higher education and the higher education programs they accredit.” This determination is made by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity. Any accrediting body, whether at the institutional level or the program level, must meet the criteria for recognition as established by the Secretary of Education.

The primary purpose of recognition by the USDE is to assure that students who receive federal educational funds receive a quality education. Specifically, the USDE notes that to be eligible for recognition an agency must demonstrate that accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of the academic programs to establish eligibility to participate in non-HEA (Higher Educational Authorization) Federal financial aid programs. This link to federal programs is critically important to recognition by the USDE. USDE documents state: “Some of the criteria for recognition, such as the criterion requiring a link to Federal programs, have no bearing on the quality of an accrediting agency; however, they do have the effect of making some agencies ineligible for recognition for reasons other than quality.” Interestingly, more than 40% of all accrediting agencies are not recognized by the USDE, some due to the fact that they cannot establish a federal eligibility link.

There are audiology programs that do receive federal funds and therefore the federal link can be established. However, the ACAE can only seek USDE recognition if one of those programs that receive federal funds seeks ACAE accreditation.



ACAE Board Members (front, from left): George Osborne, Catherine Palmer, Doris Gordon, Cynthia Ellison, Eric Hecker. Back, from left: Kevin Ruggle, Lisa Hunter, Ian Windmill (Chair). Board members not pictured: Angela Loavenbruk, Linda Seested-Stanford.

testimony and amendment language for Maryland’s new licensure standards. One amendment included program accreditation by either the Council of Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA) or the Accreditation Commission of Audiology Education (ACAE). While ASHA supported the vast majority of amendments to the licensure legislation as proposed by the licensure board, they voiced strong opposition to the inclusion of the ACAE. The ACAE is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as an accrediting agency for entry level programs in audiology.”

In particular, the last sentence in the paragraph notes that the ACAE is not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education. This is a

If none of those programs choose to seek these funds, then no federal link can be established and therefore ACAE would be ineligible to be recognized.

The USDE further states: “Agencies seeking initial recognition are reminded that recognition by the Secretary is not a prerequisite for an agency to function as an accrediting body, i.e., an agency does not have to obtain recognition before it begins to accredit institutions or programs. Rather, recognition is granted by the Secretary to an agency that meets certain Federal eligibility requirements and can demonstrate compliance with all of the criteria for recognition, establishing through its accrediting actions and decisions that it is a reliable authority regarding the quality of education offered by the institutions or programs it accredits.” This paragraph specifically states that *recognition by the USDE is not necessary* for an agency to function as an accrediting agency.

The ACAE plans to seek recognition by the USDE, and CHEA. However, the USDE policy on application notes: “...a new accrediting agency will need to have had at least two years’ experience functioning as an accrediting agency - establishing standards, evaluating institutions or programs for compliance with those standards, and making accrediting decisions based on those standards - before it submits its application for recognition.” Even without the federal link issue, the ACAE must establish a track record of performance before seeking recognition.

In summary, there is no requirement that the ACAE be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. In fact, the USDE specifically notes that recognition is not necessary to act as an accrediting agency. More than 40% of all accrediting agencies are not so recognized. Moreover, the ACAE will be ineligible to seek this recognition until such time as an AuD program seeks federal funds requiring accreditation by an agency recognized by the USDE, and until two years of



Jerry Church, of Central Michigan University, receives plaque from Ian Windmill, ACAE Chair and Paul Pessis, President of the American Academy of Audiology, in recognition of his university department achieving the first accreditation from the Accreditation Commission of Audiology Education (ACAE).

accrediting programs has occurred. The ACAE does, in fact, plan to seek recognition by the USDE and CHEA at the appropriate juncture. Universities, academic programs in Audiology, and state licensing boards can rest assured that the ACAE is well within established guidelines by any and all agencies as it proceeds forward, and the lack of recognition at this time by the USDE is not an issue.

Information contained in the article was quoted from accreditation documents contained on the website of the United States Department of Education. Further information regarding recognition of accrediting agencies by the U.S. Department of Education can be found at: www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html.

IT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING....THE DOOR TO ACAE ACCREDITATION IS NOW OPEN!

On April 17, 2007, Central Michigan University became the first AuD program to receive ACAE accreditation. This historic event was announced at the general assembly at the American Academy of Audiology AudiologyNOW!, and a plaque recognizing the event was presented to Jerry Church, director of the CMU audiology program. CMU, and Washington University, have been participants in the beta site testing of the Computerized Accreditation Program (CAP) and the ACAE accreditation process. Our thanks to the faculty, staff, administration,

students and alumni of CMU who participated in the beta-testing. More importantly, we congratulate CMU on their program and their recognition.

The awarding of ACAE accreditation to the program at CMU was the culmination of four years of dedication and diligence of the members of the board of the ACAE, and particularly the work of Doris Gordon, the Executive Director of ACAE. Doris has guided the ACAE through the complexities of accreditation, including the development and adoption of educational standards, development of policies and procedures consistent with

the guidelines of the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, and the creation of the CAP web-based system.

The development of the ACAE is the opportunity for audiology to fully integrate the educational foundation of the profession into the vision for professional autonomy. The recognition of the AuD program at CMU is only the first step in this regard. The ACAE is pleased to announce that it will begin accepting applications for accreditation from other university programs beginning in July of this year.