

Happy 10th Birthday to the ACAE

By Doris Gordon

This year, 2013, marks the 10th Anniversary of the Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education (ACAE). This was a decade of purposeful and creative growth. The ACAE Board of Directors is extremely pleased with ACAE's development, but also knows that there is so much more to do. Echoing Winston Churchill, our productive first ten years is just "the end of the beginning."

A Good Beginning

From 2003 to 2013, ACAE advanced a vision proposed by leaders within the profession of audiology. Their dream was to develop an accreditation organization that had a sound, forward-looking infrastructure for the new doctor of audiology (AuD) degree. There could not be a change in the degree only; there had to be a commensurate change in the educational standards as well. Students needed to be competent and grounded in the scope of audiology at the doctoral level as soon as they graduated. ACAE was created to make certain that education fulfilled the aspirations of the AuD.

In its first 10 years ACAE can claim the following:

- Doctoral standards devoted to the audiology profession in 2005, with a revision ongoing in 2013
- An integrated Web-based system that helps to measure what programs are doing and yields data enabling better decision making

about performance and student outcomes

- Two beta sites that closely reviewed the technology as they went through the accreditation process

Ensuring competency in education is not only an investment in the future, it is a requirement. Unless there is comprehensive care about the preparation of tomorrow's graduates, the health of a profession is at stake.

We believe we made the right decisions in the beginning years

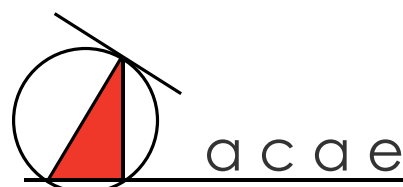
**“Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”
—Winston Churchill**

- Four accredited programs and three more in process
- Recognition as an accrediting body from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- A stakeholder survey that provided important data on the current state of audiology education and suggested improvements in the future

of ACAE, and that we are on track for the future. Our concentration on excellence, qualitative student outcomes, and rigorous standards are themes that are still pertinent. We think our belief in collaboration, focus on efficiency, and investment in a technological tool that provides data for individual programs, as well as aggregate benchmarking with other programs, portend a healthy future for the commission.

With a Solid Beginning, Where Do We Go in the Future?

The emphasis on demonstrable quality in higher education is being discussed in print, online, and in political and educational circles.



But the future of higher education is dramatically changing, and ACAE needs to keep pace with advancements and trends. Three major reasons for these changes have to do with value, cost, and access. Is a student receiving the quality education that is expected before undertaking a four-year course of study? Why have costs for education been increasing? How can more diverse and lower-income student populations gain access to education? In 2011–2012, the federal government distributed \$174 billion in financial aid to students attending accredited institutions (Baum and Payea, 2012). The government and public have valid reasons to ask educators and accreditors about cost, value, and access. They are still looking for answers, but some interesting experiments are taking place.

Today we are seeing that education is becoming more accessible around the globe via exceptional courses offered online, for example,

MOOCs (massive open online courses). There also are different educational models that are more intensive, quality-driven, cost-efficient, and less time-consuming (i.e., three years instead of four). These concepts are becoming increasingly popular. As *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman reminds us, “average is over.” Employers want only the most outstanding graduates.

With respect to audiology, a recent ACAE survey of stakeholders with more than 1,000 respondents provided feedback from university faculty, private practice practitioners, and clinicians. The results indicated a disparity between high aspirations for audiology education and its actual achievements. This reinforces the need for our accreditation agency to critically evaluate and monitor academic programs. We cannot be complacent in our efforts to promote the highest quality education.

All of these factors dictate an accreditation process that is limber and geared to the modern age. ACAE fills that bill, having built right from the beginning a system that was up-to-date and adaptable to the brave new world we are entering. We must continue along this path. So “Happy Birthday, ACAE,” and may the next 10 years build on your solid beginning and strengthen your foundation of excellence in audiology education. 🎂

Doris Gordon is executive director of the ACAE.

Reference

Baum S, Payea K. (2012) *Trends in Student Aid*. New York: College Board.

