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PRESIDENT,
AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF AUDIOLOGY



President's *Message*

Accreditation: I'm Not a Student, What's in It for Me? And Why Should I Pay for It?

It sounds dry and arcane. We associate it with being a student. We know that it's required for graduate training programs, but how much do we really know about what it is, why it's required (by licensing boards, and in some instances, by the federal government through the Department of Education [USDE]), and who the players are in accreditation? If you're like me, not much. But I've learned a lot over this past year!

Accreditation is a process, or series of processes, by which an educational facility or a training program is recognized as meeting the standards of the profession. And not only meeting it once, but demonstrating ongoing excellence through processes of monitoring and reaccreditation.

Every profession has accredited programs. Students make choices about which programs to attend based on their accreditation status. While recognition by the USDE is not a requirement for an accreditation body, if the training program receives federal monies through training grants, USDE recognition is a requirement. But only in that case. Some AuD programs do receive federal funds; the Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education (ACAE) can only seek USDE approval if a program that has federal funding then chooses to be accredited by ACAE.

What are standards? Two types of standards are considered in accreditation: professional standards (developed by the profession as the guideposts for what an individual should know to be a practicing professional) and academic standards (developed by the accrediting agency to ensure that the training program adequately provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet professional standards). Professional standards documents describe the knowledge, competencies and skills required of an individual to be able to meet the elements contained

in the scope of practice. The Academy has a Professional Standards Committee, chaired by Cheryl DeConde Johnson, as well as standards consultants, to help in the process of developing standards. It is incumbent upon an accredited training program to meet the standards for accreditation, and this is ensured through a periodic reaccreditation process. Programs that fail to meet standards lose their accreditation.

Licensing boards typically require that students graduate from accredited programs that are housed in accredited institutions. Regional (institutional) accreditation differs from program accreditation. It would be possible to have an audiology training program in a regionally accredited university, but without program accreditation. This, needless to say, would be a bad thing! For that reason, licensing boards want to see not only that the institution is accredited but that the training program itself is accredited by an accrediting body that takes its standards from a professional organization.

In our field, training programs have historically been accredited by the Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA), which is an arm of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. CAA standards, until very recently, were designed to accredit master's degree programs in audiology. With the advent of the AuD, professional standards—and related accreditation standards—needed to change.

In 2001, the Board of the American Academy of Audiology made a request that a new accreditation body be formed: An accreditation body that would accredit doctoral-level AuD programs and not master's programs (as were accredited by CAA). An accreditation body that utilized audiologists, and audiologists only, to accredit audiology training programs. And an accreditation body that would

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recognize new professional standards for the education, training and competencies required in AuD programs.

The Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education, or ACAE, was launched in 2003. It was initially funded by a joint effort of the AAA, the Audiology Foundation of America (AFA), and the ADA (at that time the Academy of Dispensing Audiologists, now the Academy of Doctors of Audiology). Today, funding is provided primarily by the American Academy of Audiology. The ACAE is an independent accrediting body, with its own articles of incorporation, its own board, and its own mission. It functions independently of the Academy, elects its own board and officers, sets its own budget, and makes completely independent determinations regarding program accreditation, but it reflects the standards of our profession as determined by the Academy.

Today, the ACAE has completed the accreditation of one AuD program: Central Michigan University. Washington University is awaiting the accreditation decision by ACAE, having been through the site-visit process. The ACAE has approached the licensing board in California about the possibility of being recognized as the accrediting body for the two proposed AuD programs in California (University of California, Los Angeles/California State University, Northridge, and University of California, San Francisco/

San Francisco State University). The outcome of the decision by the California Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Board (SLPAB), if favorable, will be a significant milestone in the recognition of ACAE.

Licensing board recognition of accrediting bodies is critically important. This is a good time for you to take a close look at your Practice Act—the laws and regulations of your state audiology licensing board. You will find the definition of what is termed an “approved institution” and/or “approved program accreditation.” Each and every state will eventually need to recognize the ACAE as an approved accreditation body in order for our profession to move forward in concert with our emerging professional standards. You might contact the State Leaders in your state, or the audiologists who sit on your licensing boards, to see how things are progressing in your state and how you can help in the effort to recognize the AuD and the ACAE.

How many programs will choose to be accredited by ACAE? Eventually, all of them. As students recognize the value of ACAE accreditation, they will choose these programs. Universities, wanting to compete for students, will recognize that there is an advantage to having ACAE accreditation, and will choose this path. This is a process and will not happen overnight. But it will happen.

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Why is accreditation important, not only to training programs and students but to the future of the profession of audiology? Why should we support ACAE, with our dollars and our volunteer efforts?

Our profession's future growth and strength are ensured by new generations of students graduating from AuD programs. These programs, depending on who accredits them and the standards specified for accreditation, may train and turn out highly competent, knowledgeable, broadly trained professionals, or may turn out students who are unable to practice competently and knowledgeably. The difference rests, in large part, on the standards used to accredit the training programs from which the students graduate.

If you hire an audiologist, if you are looking for a business partner in your private practice or someone to run a satellite clinic, or if your boss hires an audiologist to work alongside you in the clinic, you want this individual to be a competent, independent, well-trained and knowledgeable audiologist.

Accreditation affects all of us. Accreditation improves practice, not by punitive action but by having a positive impact on how training programs educate students. It affects the future of our profession—how

Our foundation, the American Academy of Audiology Foundation (AAAF), is helping to fund the ACAE. For more information or to donate visit www.audiologyfoundation.org.



we are viewed by other health-care professionals, consumers, and payers. We cannot afford to have our professional standards developed and owned by any organization other than the American Academy of Audiology. We cannot afford to have an accreditation body govern our training programs if they do not have the highest professional standards on which to base their academic standards.

The Academy Board, in its January 2008 meeting, voted to create a permanent budgetary line item for monetary support for the ACAE. The ACAE in turn is working to find other funding partners, because the cost of accreditation is great, and accreditation programs are never profitable. The Academy and the ACAE have, together, formed a working group to look at funding opportunities to help underwrite the costs associated with an accreditation program.

Our foundation, the American Academy of Audiology Foundation (AAAF), is helping to fund the ACAE. Please consider a donation. Accreditation is expensive but necessary, and it will guarantee our future—the future of our profession. It is time to take ownership of the accreditation of our own training programs! 🗣️