



Overview

Quality Assurance System
in Higher Education

**UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA**

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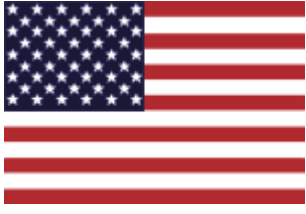
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I. Basic information of the country

Name of country/region	United States of America									
Capital	Washington D.C.									
Major language	English									
Population*	281,420,000 (The third largest in the world)									
Nominal GDP*	13,841,300,000,000 USD (2007)									
Nominal GDP per capita*	45,845 USD (2007)									
Public spending on education as a percentage of the total governmental spending**	All levels of education 14.4% (OECD average 13.4%)	HE level 3.5% (OECD average 3.1%)								
Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP**	All levels of education 5.3% (OECD average 5.4%)	HE level 1.3% (OECD average 1.3%)								
Spending per student at higher education level**	22,476 USD									
Public spending on higher education per student**	7,957 USD									
Progression rate into higher education** ***	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>HE level¹</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2004 (a)</td> <td>63.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1999 (b)</td> <td>60.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(a) - (b)</td> <td>3.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>¹ This enrollment rate of 18-year-olds includes both full-time and part-time students in two- and four-year institutions.</p>			HE level ¹	2004 (a)	63.8%	1999 (b)	60.7%	(a) - (b)	3.1%
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2004 (a)	63.8%									
1999 (b)	60.7%									
(a) - (b)	3.1%									
Organization of education system	See II-2 Diagram of the US educational system.									
Cycle of academic year****	September to June									

Sources:

* The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Overview of the United States
<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/index.html>

** Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008), *International Comparative Education Statistics 2008-2009*

*** Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008), *International Comparative Education Statistics 2003-2004*

**** International Association of Universities, World Higher Education Database (WHED), United States of America - Education System

II. The higher education system

1. Historical overview - focusing on quality assurance

1636 - Harvard College established.

During the colonial era, the colleges, e.g., Harvard, William and Mary (founded in 1693), and Yale (1701), were established as adjuncts of their respective churches, which meant facility with classical language, grounding in the basic philosophies of Aristotle, and a smattering of general worldly knowledge. The curriculum of the colleges in this era aimed to provide students with a liberal education. The founding documents of all three schools speak to the aim of educating ministers.

In the latter half of the 18th century - After the U.S. independence, the newly sovereign states made provision for collegiate education for their citizens. States that had no colleges chartered new institutions.

1862 - The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 allowed many states to receive land to build colleges to help promote economic and civic development in the states.

The balance of postsecondary study in the United States in this era comprised three different types: the groups of colleges and universities to be engaged in higher learning, e.g., liberal arts colleges, and normal schools which nurture elementary and secondary school teachers; private vocational and trade schools established by independent entrepreneurs; and national faith-related colleges or institutes.

1885 - The oldest regional accrediting organization, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, was founded.

Accreditation was originally practiced by colleges as a means to determine quality in high schools, so that higher education institutions could be assured that secondary graduates met acceptable standards for admission. Later, colleges themselves began to participate in accreditation to assure that credits earned by transfer students from one higher education institution to another would be acceptable. Programmatic accreditors were created in a parallel fashion out of earlier professional societies over a long period of time as various professions became recognizably distinct, beginning with established fields like medicine and the law.

1920s - Enrollments in higher education approximately doubled during the 1920s, and this expansion triggered quantitative changes analogous to what Martin Trow would later identify as the transition from elite to mass higher education.

As higher education continued to grow and diversify, professional education in new fields continued to emerge. Subsequently, the demand for new programmatic accrediting organizations increased.

1945 to 1975 - This period was the most expansive in the American experience (1950: 2.7 million students; 1960: 3.6 million; 1970: 7.9 million). After World War II, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill) made access to higher education a national priority. In the 1960s and 1970s, the launching and rapid growth of community colleges further expanded postsecondary education opportunities.

Higher education's relationship with the federal government changed in these years. The federal investment in higher education increased significantly in the 1970s, with the new funds being used to support student access. Direct support for research remained at high levels, and, eventually, expanded once more in the 1980s.

With the passage of the G.I. Bill, the accreditation system began to change. With the growth in federal student aid, the federal government began to use this non-governmental accreditation system to determine the eligibility of higher education institutions to receive federal student financial assistance and other federal funds. The federal recognition process, as a way of regulating the accreditation enterprise and producing a list of federally recognized accrediting organization, was initiated in 1952. The Higher Education Act of 1965 required the federal government to somehow determine institutional eligibility to receive these funds, and it turned to accreditation to do this job.

1996 - CHEA was established.

The development of accreditation in America was unplanned and produced many instances of duplication and unanticipated difficulty. As a result, efforts to coordinate accreditation on a national basis have been taken over a long period of time. The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) formed. It established process for recognizing accrediting organizations. COPA dissolved and the National Policy Board on Institutional Accreditation (NPB) established in 1993 to examine need for national coordination of accreditation. The NPB-established working group designed a new organization to coordinate accreditation.

2003 - Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act initiated with emphasis on accreditation and accountability to the public.

2006 - The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education issued report highly critical of higher education and accreditation.

2008 - The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 was signed into law and there are significant changes in several accreditation-areas.

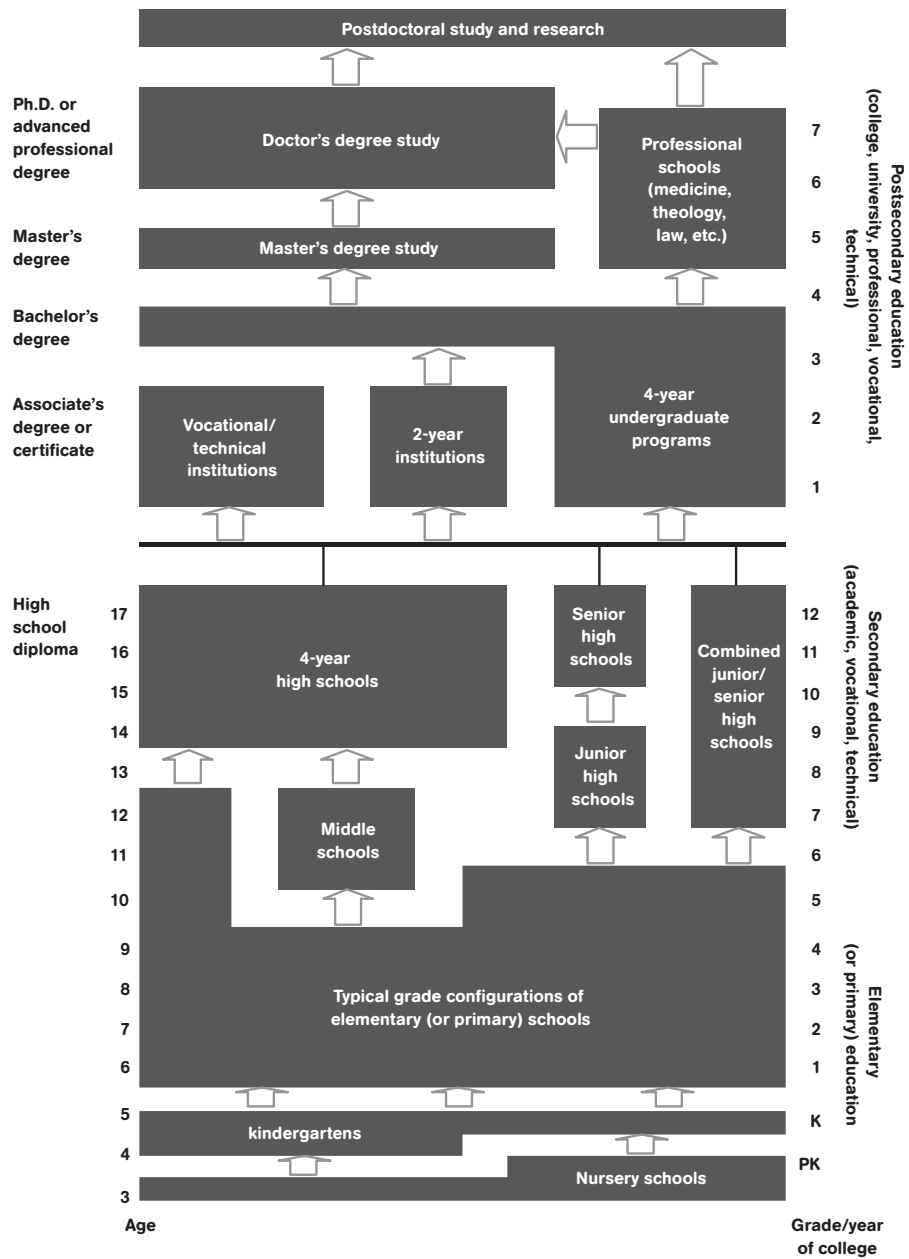
*Refer to Chapter III-5 for more detail of the recent of U.S. quality assurance of higher education.

Source: *Philip G. Altbach, Robert O. Berdahl and Patricia J. Gumpert, American Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century, p.39-43, 57, 64*

Peter T. Ewell, U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance, p.17-21, 28, 48

The Spellings Commission's Report, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education, p.ix
MEXT, Higher Education System in Five Countries, p.20-22

2. Diagram of the educational system in the United States of America



Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/figures/fig_01.asp

3. Type and size of higher education institutions

Types of degree-awarding institutions

The type of degree-awarding institutions may be categorized by three aspects - public or private, two- or four-year, non-profit or for-profit. They are typically divided into the following groups:

- Public two-year institutions (e.g. community colleges)
- Public four-year institutions (e.g. universities, colleges)
- Private two-year institutions (e.g. junior colleges)
- Private four-year institutions (e.g. research universities, liberal-arts colleges)

Higher education institutions in the United States are organized and licensed or chartered as non-profit or for-profit corporations, regardless of whether they are public or private. These corporate entities are governed by boards of trustees, who are citizens appointed by a governor or legislature (public institutions) or elected by the board itself (private institutions).

Public institutions, in addition to having governing boards appointed by state authorities, will also receive some annual allocation of state budget funds.

Private institutions are independent of state control even though they are licensed or authorized by state governments. They may be non-profit or for-profit, and may be secular or affiliated with a religious community. Some private institutions may be authorized by state governments to receive state operating funds and to provide some public services.

Source: *ACE, An Overview of Higher Education in the United States, p.1-2*

U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Organization of U.S. Education: Tertiary Institutions
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec-inst.doc>

Number of institutions (2006-2007)

	Public	Private	Total	Rate of Private institutions
4-year institutions	643	1,986	2,629	75.5%
2-year institutions	1,045	640	1,685	38.0%
Total	1,688	2,626	4,314	60.9%

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_255.asp

Number of enrollments, by type of institution (Fall 2005)

	Public	Private	Total	Rate of Private institutions
4-year institutions	6,837,605	4,161,815	10,999,420	37.9%
2-year institutions	6,184,229	303,826	6,488,055	4.7%
Total	13,021,834	4,465,641	17,487,475	25.5%

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_177.asp

Number of enrollments, by attendance status (Fall 2005)

Public (1)	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Rate of Part-time
4-year institutions	5,021,745	1,815,860	6,837,605	26.6%
2-year institutions	2,387,016	3,797,213	6,184,229	61.4%
Total	7,408,761	5,613,073	13,021,834	43.1%

Private (2)	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Rate of Part-time
4-year institutions	3,128,464	1,033,351	4,161,815	24.8%
2-year institutions	259,786	44,040	303,826	14.5%
Total	3,388,250	1,077,391	4,465,641	24.1%

(1) + (2)	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Rate of Part-time
4-year institutions	8,150,209	2,849,211	10,999,420	25.9%
2-year institutions	2,646,802	3,841,253	6,488,055	59.2%
Total	10,797,011	6,690,464	17,487,475	38.3%

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_184.asp

Number of staff (Fall 2005)

	Public	Private	Total	Rate of Private institutions
Total	2,267,687	1,111,400	3,379,087	32.9%

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_177.asp

4. Student admission

The US higher education includes institutions with a wide range of admission selectivity, from open-access two- and four-year institutions that admit all students, to highly selective research universities and liberal arts colleges that admit only a small fraction of those who apply. Admissions decisions at selective institutions are based on a fixed set of academic criteria, including high school coursework, grade point average and class rank, and admissions test score, as well as a more flexible set of non-academic characteristics, such as demonstrated leadership ability, creativity, and community service. The admissions decisions at highly selective institutions are so complex and consider so many factors. Because the US has no national secondary school curriculum or high school exit examination, colleges rely on two privately developed admissions examinations - the SAT and ACT.

Source: *ACE, An Overview of Higher Education in the United States, p.8*

5. Type of academic degrees, terms of study, and completion requirements

Associate Degree

The associate degree can be awarded in academic or professional subjects and also in terminal career and technical programs. Two-year colleges (community colleges) and a small number of four-year institutions grant associate degrees. Associate degrees may represent a terminal degree in a vocational field or may prepare students to complete a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution. Credits earned in associate degree programs can be transferred to bachelor's degree programs under certain conditions. The transfer of credits from associate degree programs to bachelor's degree programs are usually governed by what are called articulation agreements between institutions.

An associate degree can be defined as "An award that requires completion of an organized program of study of at least 2 but less than 4 years of full-time academic study or more than 60, but less than 120 semester credit hours" (NCES). Unlike certificate and diploma programs, the associate degree is a recognized higher education degree. Most associate degrees earned in academic programs are Associate of Arts (AA) or Science (AS) degrees.

Source: ACE, *An Overview of Higher Education in the United States*, p.9

U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Structure of the U.S. Education System: Associate Degrees
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/associate.doc>

Bachelor's Degree

U.S. bachelor's degrees are usually planned to take 4 academic years of full-time study to complete. However, many degrees take longer to complete, including those in engineering, architecture and other fields; and many bachelor's degrees are completed in less than 4 years by highly qualified and motivated students. The bachelor's degree may be defined as "An award that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work." (NCES)

U.S. bachelor degree programs usually include requirements for breadth as well as depth of study, and students will fulfill what are called liberal or general studies requirements for introductory knowledge in several subjects as well as a concentration in one or more subjects, called a "major."

U.S. educators and employers believe strongly that the bachelor's degree should prepare students for entry-level jobs as well as for possible advanced study. Whether students continue their studies or enter the labor market, they will need to understand the basic principles of fields other than their own narrow specialization, and they will need skills - such as languages, IT and computational skills - that cannot be obtained exclusively in their major field. This extra knowledge and skill must be obtained at the higher education level. And the degree program should be structured so that the additional knowledge and skill complements the main subject concentration.

Most bachelor's degrees are titled Bachelor of Arts (BA or AB) or Bachelor of Science (BS or SB), but there are many other bachelor's degree titles in use.

Honors bachelor's degrees are awarded and involve more independent study, require a thesis or special project, and may have special admissions requirements.

A number of U.S. higher education institutions offer programs that permit a student to earn a specialized certificate (it can also be called a diploma) at the same time the bachelor's degree is earned or shortly thereafter. Post-bachelor's certificates usually require no more than a single academic year to complete, and are often completed as part of the degree program.

Source: U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), *Structure of the U.S. Education System: Bachelor's Degrees*
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/bachelor.doc>

Master's Degrees

The master's degree is the first graduate-level qualification, or second cycle degree, in the U.S. higher education system. Master's degrees generally take two years to complete, but the time period may be shorter or longer depending on how the degree program is structured, whether the student is enrolled full-time or part-time, the degree requirements and the prior preparation of the student.

The most common academic master's degrees are the Master of Arts (MA or AM) and Master of Science (MS or SM). However, there are many different master's degree titles, especially in the professional fields.

Master's degrees awarded in academic fields are generally research degrees that require the completion of required graduate-level courses and seminars, passing comprehensive examinations in the major subfield of research and usually one or more minor subfields, and the preparation and defense of a master's thesis under faculty supervision.

Master's degrees awarded in professional fields may be structured as research degrees (as in engineering, for example), or they may be structured specifically to prepare students to work in an applied professional field at an advanced level (as with the MBA).

Source: U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), *Structure of the U.S. Education System: Master's Degrees*
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/master.doc>

Doctoral Degrees

The research doctorate, or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and its equivalent titles, represents the highest academic qualification in the U.S. education system. U.S. doctorates are structured programs of advanced study and supervised research. Students admitted to doctoral programs must complete all qualifying graduate-level coursework and participate in doctoral seminars and colloquia. Students who complete these preliminary requirements at a satisfactory level (usually an A average grade is required) must then pass written comprehensive examinations that cover their chosen research specialization plus two or more adjunct specialties, one of which is often in a related subject area. Successful students who pass the examinations and receive the recommendation of the doctoral faculty are advanced to candidacy for the doctorate.

The doctoral candidate selects a doctoral dissertation advisor and doctoral committee. The advisor and committee approve the dissertation research proposal and are available to advise on the progress of the independent research program. When the candidate and the advisor judge that the research is

completed and the dissertation is finished, the candidate is scheduled for a public oral examination defending the dissertation. At the conclusion of the oral defense, the dissertation committee votes on whether to award the doctorate and sign the dissertation, which is then published via university printing services and made available electronically for the academic community.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Structure of the U.S. Education System: Research Doctorate Degrees* <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/doctorate.doc>

First-Professional degrees

First-professional degrees represent a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system.

A first-professional degree is an award that requires completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 2 years of college work prior to entering the program; and (3) a total of at least 6 academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself. First-professional degrees may be awarded in 10 fields including Chiropractic, Medicine, Jurisprudence, and Divinity.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Structure of the U.S. Education System: First-Professional Degrees* <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/professional.doc>

Intermediate Graduate Qualifications

The U.S. higher education system awards several qualifications that represent studies and research beyond the master's degree but that are not the equivalent of a research doctorate. Most of these qualifications are in professional fields of study and represent a level of education corresponding to advanced professional standing.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Structure of the U.S. Education System: Intermediate Graduate Qualifications* <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/grad.doc>

6. Agency responsible for higher education

The US federal government does not have any direct authority over US education. The Constitution does not mention education as a general responsibility, the federal government plays a limited role and the US has never had an education ministry.

Public and private higher education institutions enjoy more autonomy and are more internally self-governing than are schools. Nevertheless, state governments exercise oversight and coordinating authority over higher education within their jurisdictions, issue corporate charters to institutions, regulate standards and quality to varying degrees, and may have regulatory authority over various aspects of the operation of public institutions.

The role of the US federal government is limited to the following:

- Exercising leadership in promoting educational policies and reform efforts of national scope;
- Administering federal assistance programs authorized and appropriated by Congress;
- Enforcing federal civil rights laws as they pertain to education;
- Providing information and statistics about education at the national and international levels; and
- Providing technical expertise to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, other federal agencies and Executive Office of the President in conducting the foreign affairs of the United States as these pertain to education and within the limited scope of federal power in this area.

The federal government does not:

- Own, control or oversee U.S. schools or postsecondary institutions*;
- Inspect, accredit, or license schools, postsecondary institutions, or other educational providers;
- Set curricula or content standards for academic or professional subjects;
- Hire or license faculty or other educational professionals;
- Set educational standards for the admission, enrollment, progress, or graduation of students at any level;
- Set standards, license, or regulate professional occupations or practicing professionals (other than federal civilian and military personnel); or
- Determine or allocate educational budgets for states, localities, or institutions.

*Except for institutions established to serve federal personnel and their families, such as the military service academies and advanced service schools, plus public schools located overseas to educate children of U.S. personnel stationed abroad.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Structure of the U.S. Education System: State Role II - Tertiary Education*

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec.doc>

The Federal Role

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/fedrole.doc>

7. Major university/college associations

- American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) <http://www.aascu.org/>
National association representing the state-funded and state-affiliated higher education institutions in the United States.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) <http://www.aacu.org/>
National association of higher education institutions, including both public and private institutions as well as universities offering graduate studies, that are committed to undergraduate (bachelor's level) education in the US tradition of the liberal arts.
- Association of American Universities (AAU) <http://www.aau.edu/>
National association of comprehensive research universities that focus on doctoral studies in a wide variety of subjects, and are concerned with issues of scientific research, research funding, and related policy issues.

- Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) <http://www.cic.edu/>
National association of private higher education institutions, especially independent undergraduate colleges and small to mid-sized universities emphasizing undergraduate teaching as well as research.
- National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) <http://www.naicu.edu/>
National associate of private higher education institutions of all types and emphasizing both teaching and research.
- National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC)
<http://www.nasulgc.org/>
National association of state colleges and universities established and partially funded under the First and Second Morrill Acts of the U.S. government (1862 and 1890) plus other state higher education institutions.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Organization of U.S. Education: Tertiary Institutions*
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/postsec-inst.doc>

8. Student participation in the university administration and student organizations

University Administration

Although the internal organization and structure of U.S. institutions vary based upon size and mission, some common elements exist.

Board of trustees: Lay boards of trustees who tend not to be academics govern most college and universities. These boards are the legal agents for the institution and are responsible for ensuring and monitoring its financial health, setting strategy to fulfill its mission, and evaluating both institutional and presidential performance. The size, structure, and appointment of boards vary.

President: Boards hire and delegate much of the administrative responsibility for managing the institution to the president (sometimes called a chancellor). The president is responsible for providing overall leadership to the institution, managing its finances and budget, developing and executing the institution's strategic plan, and establishing systems of accountability and performance. However, much of the president's work lies outside the institution. The president advocates for the institution's needs and seeks support from legislative and other external audiences, meets with alumni and prospective students, develops relationships with corporations and community groups, and provides the public persona of the institution. Beyond the president, other senior administrators provide the leadership for the institution's various divisions.

Faculty senate: Although presidents have primary responsibility for the institution, most rely upon a system of shared governance between faculty and administrators for key institutional decisions. The primary organizational structure for shared governance is the faculty senate. The senate is responsible for recommending academic decisions and policies, such as those affecting new curricula and courses, degree requirements, and academic hiring and workloads. Its members typically include

full-time faculty, although students, administrators, staff, and part-time faculty sometimes participate as well.

Student organizations

Colleges and universities host various student organizations and clubs, including academically focused groups, as well as athletic, cultural and religious, and social organizations. Another important student organization is student government, which is the formal, recognized student advocacy body on campus.

Source: *ACE, An Overview of Higher Education in the United States, p.11-12*

9. Tuition and required fees

Average undergraduate tuition fees charged for full-time students (2006-2007)

Unit: USD

		Tuition and required fees	Total fee*
Public	4-year	5,685	12,805
	2-year	2,017	6,810
Private	4-year	20,492	28,896
	2-year	12,620	20,167
All institutions	4-year	10,913	18,445
	2-year	2,511	7,497

*Total fee includes tuition, room, and board rates (7-day basis).

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics*
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_320.asp

10. Student aid

A wide array of government and private financial aid programs provides assistance to student, based on both financial need and academic merit. Financial aid to students includes federal grants, loans, and tax credits, state grants, and grants provided by colleges and universities, as well as private organizations.

Federal student aid is financial help for students enrolled in eligible programs at participating schools to cover school (a four-year or two-year public or private educational institution, a career school or trade school) expenses, including tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, and transportation. The three most common types of aid are grants, loans, and work-study.

Grants are a type of financial aid that doesn't have to be repaid. Generally, grants are for undergraduate students and the grant amount is based on need, Cost of Attendance, and enrollment status. Federal Pell Grants for 2008-2009 will range from \$890 to \$4,731. Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants will range from \$100 to \$4,000.

Loans are borrowed money that must be repaid with interest. Both undergraduate and graduate students may borrow money. Maximum loan amounts depend on the student's year in school. Parents

may also borrow to pay education expenses for dependent undergraduate students. Examples are Federal Stafford Loans made to students, and PLUS Loans to parents and graduate/professional students.

Work-study lets students earn money while enrolled in school to help pay for education expenses.

The United States government does not provide student assistance to non-citizens except in the limited case of federal exchange programs and some research opportunities for scientists and mid-career professionals. Students who come to the United States to study for diplomas or degrees are expected to be able to pay for their study visits using their own resources plus assistance from their countries or private sources.

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Financial Assistance*

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-studyus-finaid.html>

Federal Student Aid, Student Aid on the Web

<http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/aboutus.jsp>

11. Higher education laws

The U.S. education system is not based on one, or even a few, framework laws. Instead, there are a wide variety of federal, state and local laws, plus court decisions and regulations that define various aspects of our decentralized system. In addition, there are rules and policies adopted by educational associations and individual schools and institutions that often have legal status with respect to matters within their competence. (Also see II-1. Historical overview.)

Source: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), General Information Resources About Education in the United States*

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/generalinfo.doc>

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<http://studentaid.ed.gov/>

III. The quality assurance system

1. Introduction

The United States system of higher education is the most diverse in the world. Higher education quality review in the United States is a similarly diverse enterprise. Unlike most countries, the United States has no centralized “Ministry of Education” to enforce national standards. Instead, the functions of quality review are performed variously by federal and state government agencies, nonprofit nongovernmental organizations and for-profit services.

External quality review

External quality review refers to activities undertaken by organizations or agencies outside of a college, university or program to measure, validate or certify its quality. External review takes many forms, from accreditation to federal data collection and from state accountability and licensure reviews to survey-based rankings of institutions.

The purposes of external review are also manifold and include:

- promoting institutional accountability
- ensuring that institutions meet specific certification or licensing requirements
- establishing the eligibility of institutions to offer degrees and certificates
- enabling institutions or programs to receive public funding
- enforcing minimum financial and administrative standards
- providing consumers with information on which to base education-related decisions
- improving quality within institutions and programs

Internal quality review

Internal reviews for quality have long been part of the culture of higher education. Tenure and promotion reviews, peer reviews of research, student evaluations and program reviews are examples of this tradition. Governing boards also play an influential quality assurance role.

Source: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.3*

2. Type of quality assurance system

- Accreditation
- Recognition of accrediting organizations
- Federal oversight of higher education
- State quality review of higher education
- Government approval

2-1. Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement.

Both federal and state governments consider accreditation to be a reliable authority on academic quality. The federal government relies on accreditation to assure the quality of institutions and programs for which the government provides federal funds and for which the government provides federal aid to students. Most state governments will initially license institutions and programs without accreditation. However, states will subsequently require accreditation to make state funds available to institutions and students.

Source: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.3*

Values and beliefs of accreditation

U.S. accreditation is built upon a core set of traditional academic values and beliefs. These are described by the following statements:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for academic quality; colleges and universities are the leaders and the key sources of authority in academic matters.
- Institutional mission is central to judgments of academic quality.
- Institutional autonomy is essential to sustaining and enhancing academic quality.
- Academic freedom flourishes in an environment of academic leadership of institutions.
- The higher education enterprise and our society thrive on decentralization and diversity of institutional purpose and mission.

Source: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.5*

Roles of accreditation

- Assuring quality: Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure quality to students and the public. Accredited status is a signal to students and the public that an institution or program meets at least threshold standards for, e.g., its faculty, curriculum, student services and libraries. Accredited status is conveyed only if institutions and programs provide evidence of fiscal stability.
- Access to federal and state funds: Accreditation is required for access to federal funds such as student aid and other federal programs. Federal student aid funds are available to students only if the institution or program they are attending is accredited by a recognized accrediting organization. State funds to institutions and students are contingent on accredited status.
- Engendering private sector confidence: Accreditation status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding whether to provide tuition support for current employees seeking additional education. Private individuals and foundations look for evidence of accreditation when making decisions about private giving.
- Easing transfer: Accreditation is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and

programs among colleges and universities. Receiving institutions take note of whether or not the credits a student wishes to transfer have been earned at an accredited institution. Although accreditation is but one among several factors taken into account by receiving institutions, it is viewed carefully and is considered an important indicator of quality.

Source: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.4-5*

Type and number of accrediting bodies

As of December 2007, there are 80 recognized accrediting organizations in the United States, consisting of the following types:

1) Institutional accreditors

- Regional accrediting organizations

Targets: Non-profit colleges and universities (both public and private)

Number of organizations: 8 (located in six geographic regions)

- National faith-based accrediting organizations

Targets: Religiously affiliated and doctrinally based institutions on a national basis

Number of organizations: 4

- National career-related accrediting organizations

Targets: For-profit, career-based, single-purpose institutions, both degree and non-degree

Number of organizations: 7

2) Programmatic accreditors

- Programmatic or specialized accrediting organizations

Targets: Individual academic programs, professions and free-standing schools, e.g., law, medicine, engineering and health professions.

Number of organizations: 61

Accrediting organizations are accountable to the institutions and programs they accredit. They are accountable to the public and government that have invested heavily in higher education and expect quality. Accreditors undertake an organizational self-assessment on a routine basis. Accreditors also undergo a periodic external review of their organizations known as “recognition.” (See Chapter 2-2 for more detail.)

Source: *Peter T. Ewell, U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance, p.12*

CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.8

Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.7

Frequency

Review cycle vary, with some accreditors requiring comprehensive reviews every three years, others requiring five-year reviews and still others requiring comprehensive ten years, plus more focused mid-cycle reviews.

Source: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.8*

Standards and policies

While each accrediting organization establishes its own standards by which institutions and programs are accredited, these standards all address similar areas, such as expected student achievement, curriculum, faculty, services and academic support for students and financial capacity. Standards are developed or changed through a process of public consultation involving e.g., faculty, administrators, students, practitioners in specific fields, governing boards and members of the public. This process often involves an invitation to the public through, e.g. newspapers or general mailings.

Each accrediting organization lays out a framework of expectations and practices that govern the conduct of accreditation review. These policies may include areas such as conflict of interest and release of information.

Source: CHEA, *Fact Sheet #5 Accrediting Organizations in the United States: How Do They Operate to Assure Quality?*

Stages of accreditation

- Establishment of eligibility: Every accrediting organization has certain basic requirements that institutions or programs must meet before they can apply for a review. Not all accrediting organizations have eligibility requirements, but all accreditors do require that an institution be licensed or have authority to operate from the state in which it is located and have education as its primary purpose. Such institutional or program eligibility requirements serve as a pre-screening for quality.
- Self-study: Once accepted for review, each institution or program must prepare a comprehensive evaluation of its performance based on the accrediting organization's established standards or criteria. This self-study involves the preparation of detailed written reports showing how the institution or program determines whether it meets or exceeds the standards, as well as how it plans to improve in the future. These reports may be prepared as confidential documents, although many institutions publish them after the accreditation review cycle has been completed.
- On-site team visit: The self-study becomes the basis for scrutiny by an accrediting organization's review team during a visit to the campus. Team members have an opportunity to talk to faculty, students, staff and administrators about issues and questions arising from the self-study. The team usually conducts an exit interview with the president or dean to discuss issues that have surfaced during the review.
- Written team report: The visiting team prepares a comprehensive accreditation report that includes judgments about the institution's or program's strengths, weaknesses and potential for improvement. The draft report is usually shared with the campus or program leadership before it is made final. The final report is then submitted to the accrediting organization, with recommendations about what action should be taken.
- Final decisions/appeals: Based on the team report, self-study and other evidence assembled by staff of the accrediting organization, its commission or governing body takes an accreditation action. Accreditation actions can take several forms, from granting accreditation to revoking accredited status. All accrediting organizations permit appeals of their decisions.

- **Monitoring:** All accrediting organizations also monitor institutions and programs between visits. Monitoring may be relatively unobtrusive in the form of a requirement to file annual statistical reports, or it may be more extensive, including telephone contact, interim reports on topics of concern or additional focused site visits. If the institution or program has changed its curriculum, offerings or instructional methods or has opened a new site, the accreditor may require it to undertake a substantive change review to examine the appropriateness of these new arrangements and their potential impact on the quality of the core program.

Source: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.8-9*

Peter T. Ewell, U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance, p.13-16

Schedule

Each accreditor sets its own schedule. The amount of time for an accreditation review varies from, e.g., nine months to several years to complete a full review.

Publication of data

Generally, the following information are made available by accrediting organizations:

- Under certain circumstances and with permission from institutions or programs, self-study reports and team visit reports offering description and analysis of institutions and programs that are reviewed
- Dates of upcoming accreditation visits
- Members of an organization's accrediting decision-making body
- Staff members of accrediting organizations
- Finances of accrediting organizations
- Peer evaluators: the volunteers who work with the accrediting organization and carry out accreditation review

Source: *CHEA, Fact Sheet #5 Accrediting Organizations in the United States: How Do They Operate to Assure Quality?*

Institutions and programs accredited by recognized accrediting organizations

(As of December 2007)

	Number of Institutions	Number of programs
Regional accrediting organizations	3,025	-
National faith-based accrediting organizations	449	-
National career-related accrediting organizations	3,532	-
Institutional total	7,006	-
Programmatic or specialized accrediting organizations	-	19,453
Grand total	26,459	

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) database lists approximately 7,000 degree-granting and non-degree-granting institutions and over 17,000 programs that are accredited by U.S. accrediting organizations that have been recognized either by CHEA or by the United States

Department of Education (USDE) or both. Each accrediting organization's list of institutions or programs is prefaced by a brief description of the accredited status of the institutions or programs on the list and the year for which the list is accurate.

Source: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007*, p.19-22, 61

Funds

Accrediting organizations are funded primarily by annual dues from institutions and programs that are accredited and fees that institutions and programs pay for accreditation reviews. In some instances, an accrediting organization may receive financial assistance from sponsoring organizations. Accrediting organizations sometimes obtain funds for special initiatives from government or from private foundations.

Source: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation*, p.6

2-2. Recognition of accrediting organizations

In the United States, accreditors are accountable to the institutions and programs they accredit. They are accountable to the public and government that have invested heavily in higher education and expect quality. Accreditors undertake an organizational self-assessment on a routine basis and are required to have internal complaint procedures. Accreditors undergo a periodic external review of their organizations known as "recognition." Recognition is carried out either by CHEA or USDE.

Source: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation*, p.7

(1) CHEA recognition of accreditation

CHEA is a national, private, nonprofit higher education organization that was established in 1996. CHEA's purpose is to coordinate institutional and programmatic accreditation in the United States. To realize this purpose, CHEA carries out three functions: representing the interests of private, voluntary self-regulation to the federal government and the public; scrutiny (recognition) of the quality of accrediting organizations based on standards established by CHEA for this purpose; and a range of membership activities that include conferences and meetings, research, policy analysis and publications.

CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.11

CHEA - Recognition standards

An accrediting organization seeking CHEA recognition is required to provide evidence that the following standards have been met.

1. Advance academic quality
2. Demonstrate accountability
3. Encourage, where appropriate, self-scrutiny and planning for change and needed improvement
4. Employ appropriate and fair practices in decision making

5. Demonstrate ongoing review of accreditation practice
6. Possess sufficient resources

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.11*

CHEA - Frequency and implementing structure

CHEA accreditors are normally reviewed on a 10-year cycle with two interim reports. The review is carried out by the CHEA Committee on Recognition, a group of institutional representatives, accreditors and public members who scrutinize accreditors for their eligibility for CHEA recognition and review accreditors based on an accreditor self-evaluation. The review may also include a site visit. The Committee on Recognition makes recommendations to the CHEA governing board to affirm or deny recognition to an accreditor.

Sources: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.8*

(2) Federal recognition of accreditation organizations

The federal recognition process was initiated in 1952. The government sought some screening for higher education quality to be linked to the burgeoning federal student financial assistance program. Rather than create a quality assurance system of its own, the government chose to rely on accreditation. Federal recognition is currently required for accrediting organizations that certify institutional eligibility for participation in federal student financial aid programs under Title IV of the 1965 Higher Education Act or certain other federal funding. Higher education institutions and programs wishing to participate in federal student aid or other federal programs must be accredited by a federally recognized accrediting organization.

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.12*

USDE - Recognition standards

The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

- 1) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, including as appropriate, consideration of course completion. State licensing examination and job placement rates
- 2) Curricula
- 3) Faculty
- 4) Facilities, equipment and supplies
- 5) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations
- 6) Student support services
- 7) Recruiting and admission practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications grading and advertising
- 8) Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered
- 9) Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency

- 10) Record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.12*

USDE - Frequency and implementing structure

The federal recognition review normally takes place every five years. USDE staff conduct the review based on communication with the accreditor, a written report from the accreditor and, from time to time, a visit to the accreditor. USDE staff make recommendations to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), an appointed group of educators and public members, to recognize or not recognize an accrediting organization. The committee, in turn, recommends action to the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Sources: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.9*

Recognized organizations

CHEA and USDE recognize many of the same accrediting organizations, but not all. CHEA recognizes 60 accrediting organizations and USDE recognizes 58 accrediting organizations. There are a total of 80 accrediting organizations that were recognized by either USDE or CHEA or both in 2007.

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.10*

Funds

CHEA funds its recognition activity through annual fees charged to its institutional members. The federal government funds its recognition activity through a budget allocation from Congress to USDE.

Sources: *Judith S. Eaton, An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, p.10*

2-3. Federal oversight of higher education

In addition to the regulation of accrediting organizations through the federal recognition process, this federal oversight include:

- Data collection that provides a basis for education research and for the provision of information to consumers, e.g., Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), consumer information under the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990
- Enforcement of minimum standards of financial stability and administrative capacity for institutions seeking to establish or maintain student aid eligibility

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.14-15*

2-4. State quality review of higher education

State-level quality review affects both public and private higher education institutions, but it is particularly important for public institutions because such institutions are dependent on state legislatures for a significant amount of their funding.

State quality review of higher education falls into two basic categories:

- 1) Reviews for state licensure, which affect private institutions
- 2) Reviews for state authority to operate and public accountability, including budget, policy and performance reviews, which primarily affect public institutions

Reviews for state licensure

All private institutions must be licensed at the state level to offer degrees, credentials or certificates. (See Chapter 2-5 for more detail)

State oversight

Public institutions require state authorization to operate. This is usually accomplished when the institution is created by the state legislature.

State reviews, to the extent that they are required in addition to or in place of nongovernmental accreditation reviews, tend to focus on the same aspects of quality that are examined by most accreditors. Institutions are reviewed for financial stability and administrative capacity, for overall institutional stability and to assure that they are providing the kinds of programs they claim to offer.

Accountability initiatives

The role of state oversight in assuring improved higher education accountability has been the subject of intense public policy debate. States have long been engaged in the direct assessment of public institutional performance through program reviews, data collection and budgeting processes. More recent accountability initiatives are also designed to yield readily understandable public information. All 50 states require some kind of assessment and evaluation of public higher education institutions, and most states have extended their systems to assure accountability as well, through public reporting on performance measures and a focus on the use of resources.

Current dominant themes in state accountability systems include the need to pay attention to undergraduate education and student learning outcomes and to the connection between institutional quality and student learning. Most states require public institutions to formulate student learning and outcomes assessment procedures and to set goals that will assure improvement in the quality of student learning. Increasingly, states are also looking for quantitative measures of student achievement and institutional performance, in order to document progress and improvement.

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.15-16*

2-5. Government approval

Each state and territorial government licenses or charters schools and higher education institutions within its specific jurisdiction. The federal government does not license or charter schools or institutions except for those directly operated by it for the purpose of educating or training government personnel or their children.

All states, territories, and associated jurisdictions approve the institutions and other education providers that operate from within their territorial jurisdictions. The nature of this approval process varies widely, ranging from basic corporate licensure or chartering all the way to inspection and evaluation procedures similar to those used by recognized accreditation associations. Most state governments now require licensed or chartered institutions to also have accreditation from a recognized association, or begin the process of accreditation if new.

Sources: *U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI), Government Control*
http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnei/us/edlite-accred-govt_approval.html

3. Historical overview

- See 'II-1. Historical Overview of the Higher Education System'.

4. 'Diploma mills' and 'Accreditation mills'

In their quest for higher education and training, students and the public in the United States sometimes encounter 'diploma mills' - dubious providers of educational offerings or operations that offer certificates and degrees that are considered bogus. They may also encounter 'accreditation mills' - dubious providers of accreditation and quality assurance or operations that offer a certification of quality of institutions that is considered bogus.

Diploma mills and accreditation mills mislead and harm. In the United States, degrees and certificates from mills may not be acknowledged by other institutions when students seek to transfer or to go to graduate school. Employers may not acknowledge degrees and certificates from diploma mills when providing tuition assistance for continuing education. 'Accreditation' from an accreditation mill can mislead students and the public about the quality of an institution. In the presence of diploma mills and accreditation mills, students may spend a good deal of money and receive neither an education nor useable credential.

There is no single definition of 'diploma mill' or of 'accreditation mill' in higher education. While a few states have laws or regulations regarding these operations, most do not. Some agencies of the federal government may scrutinize diploma mills or accreditation mills, but this is quite limited to date. In general, diploma mills would not pass the initial screening of accrediting organizations (review for eligibility, candidacy, or initial accreditation) and thus fall outside the purview of these bodies. Similarly, accreditation mills would struggle with the pre-screening for recognition and, thus, escape this scrutiny as well.

Identifying diploma mills and accreditation mills is not easy. A number of the features of diploma mills are similar to familiar higher education institutions. A number of the features of accreditation mills are similar to well-known accrediting organizations. Nonetheless, prospective students and the public can look for several indicators that suggest an operation may be a diploma mill or an accreditation mill. It is the presence of a number of these features taken together that should signal to students and the public that they may, indeed, be dealing with a 'mill.'

Sources: *CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review 2007, p.15-16*

5. The recent of U.S. quality assurance

Accreditation's challenges

Accreditation has evolved over the years in response to the changes in the higher education environment. The number and diversity of accrediting organizations has grown in response to the growing diversity of higher education institutions, new delivery mechanisms such as distance learning, and growing public and private interest in assuring quality in specific programs such as education, business, and engineering. However, the new higher education environment is posing some challenges to the existing accreditation system including:

- Under the global competitive environment, the focus on meeting minimum quality standards is no longer sufficient. Accreditation must play a key role in influencing higher education to move beyond minimum or adequate quality to performance excellent.
- Against the backdrop of growing demand for increased accountability to government, consumers, and the general public, the public is calling for increased transparency and reporting of consumer-friendly information relating to the performance of higher education. Accreditation can play a major role by changing accreditation standards and placing a strong emphasis on performance outcomes, especially student learning outcomes.
- The accreditation system is very complex and difficult to understand. The public-private system of accreditation must become more open and transparent to provide assurances that it is balancing institutional and public interests in setting standards and accrediting institutions and programs.
- Rising costs and reduced federal and state funding are pressuring higher education institutions to increase affordability and improve the value of and returns on higher education. While accreditors view that the accreditation process as an 'investment', institutions often view it as a significant cost with little return on investment. The accreditation process rarely lends itself toward efficiency, productivity improvement, or 'cost cutting'.

Progress in improving accreditation

Over the last decade there has been significant progress and pockets of success in improving accreditation. Since 1992, the federal government has required accreditation agencies to develop

standards that include ‘success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution’s mission’. The new emphasis on measuring student learning prompted efforts by accreditors to respond to this requirement, e.g., all regional accrediting agencies have rewritten their standards for review to include a new standard on learning results. The ABET, Inc., as the recognized U.S. accreditor of postsecondary degree-granting programs in engineering, redesigned its accreditation criteria to shift from a focus on inputs to an outcomes-based accreditation model. In addition, every state has developed some type of accountability report for higher education for use in policy, oversight and budget consideration.

The Spellings Commission’s Report

In September 2006, the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education issued the report ‘A Test of Leadership: Chartering the Future of U.S. Higher Education’. The Report initially stated that although America’s colleges and universities have accomplished much of which they and the nation can be proud, U.S. higher education needs to improve in dramatic ways. It pointed out significant problems throughout higher education, but was especially critical of accreditation. More specifically, accreditation was held to be ineffective in providing reliable information about institutional quality, too focused on institutional inputs while neglecting student learning outcomes.

Based on these findings, the Report recommended the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education, and the need for a consumer-based information database on higher education to weigh and rank comparative institutional performance. Then, accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes, including completion rates and student learning, the core of their assessment as a priority over inputs or processes.

Shortly after the release of the Report, the Secretary announced an Action Plan for Higher Education: Improving Accessibility, Affordability, and Accountability. It is designed to improve higher education’s performance and its ability to measure that performance. Concerning accreditation, to make higher education more accountable to students and other stakeholders, the Secretary has proposed ‘convene members of the accreditation community to recommend changes to the standards for recognition that would place a greater emphasis on results’.

USDE’s quick action

USDE quickly moved to implement its recommendations on accreditation. First, it employed the negotiated rulemaking process to require accreditors to establish specific standards of student achievement. Second, it directed NACIQI to be more aggressive in pressing accreditors to examine student learning outcomes against defined standards. Furthermore, according to the Strategic Plan 2007-2012 of USDE announced in May 2007, the Department will:

- work closely with states, institutions, and accrediting agencies to promote the development and consistent application of clear standards for recognition

- collaborate with these partners to identify and implement ways to include student learning outcomes in the accreditation process
- redesign its college search website to help students and their families to obtain information that will allow them to make informed choices about postsecondary education opportunities.

Impact of the Spelling Commission's Report

After a brief interval from the announcement of the Report, we have found some specific actions in line with the Report's recommendations, e.g., the website 'College Portrait™' launched most recently, which provides high school students, parents, guidance counselors and other stakeholders with access to basic, comparable information about student characteristics, costs, student experience and learning outcomes for 302 public four-year colleges and universities presented in a user-friendly format.

Most recent actions

In January 2008, CHEA and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) jointly developed the paper 'New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability' in dialogue with leaders in the nation's major higher education and accreditation associations. The President of CHEA, the President of AAC&U, and leaders of seven associations representing more than 3,000 colleges and universities pledged their leadership to continue advancing meaningful approaches to assessing essential student learning outcomes with the release of this paper. It describes six principles and eight action steps to guide institutional accountability and assessment efforts in the coming year.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 was signed into law on August 14, 2008. There are significant changes in several accreditation-related areas including:

- Student achievement - the change makes explicit the longstanding partnership between institutions and accreditors. Institutions are to set expectations of student achievement, and accreditors are to hold institutions accountable for both the level of expectation and the evidence that the expectations have been met.
- Information to the Public - To date, accrediting organizations have provided information to the public and government 'upon request'. The new law moves from 'upon request' to a requirement that accreditors routinely provide information.

Sources: *Peter T. Ewell, U.S. Accreditation and the Future of Quality Assurance, p.47-48*

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