Report of the ITAA Taskforce to Investigate Accreditation

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The following charge was given to the taskforce:

To investigate opportunities and options regarding accreditation of programs in textiles, apparel and content areas directly related to interests within the International Textile and Apparel Association, including:

- Researching Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requirements for an accrediting body / organization to be listed in CHEA.
- Exploring the process (es) and costs associated with becoming / creating an accrediting body.
- To the extent time permits, considering the process associated with accreditation.

Introduction

In an effort to complete the above charge, the taskforce spent a considerable amount of time reviewing current sources about accreditation, including documents from the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA), Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), ED.gov College Accreditation in the United States, as well as relevant articles from journals, conversations with leaders of the above organizations, and executive directors of accrediting bodies. We chose the following questions to guide discussion in order to place the charge in context.

1.   Would an accrediting body provide added value for the programs/disciplines etc., represented in ITAA?
2.   Should ITAA institute an accrediting body, would such provide advantages or disadvantages for current programs [represented in ITAA]?
3.   Will benefits of having an accrediting body outweigh costs, since instituting an accrediting body is costly in both time and $s, and require ongoing costs.
4.   Can we provide a model of success within accreditation standards that will apply to our range of programs?

5.   Is accreditation an effective deterrent of program elimination or consolidation?

While the discussion of these questions occurred in a rather circular manner, and our charge was not that of answering the above questions, the taskforce agreed that accreditation can provide added value for programs in the disciplines represented in ITAA. The level of value added might vary by programs/institutions. In addition, if ITAA chooses to institute an accrediting body, there are model of accrediting bodies with standards sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of programs. One such body is the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). Such accrediting bodies usually adhere to principles and philosophy of accreditation similar to regional accrediting organizations (See for example the Appendix: Fundamental Characteristics of Accreditation, Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools). While the fundamental characteristics of accreditation noted by the Commission on Colleges were developed for regional accreditation bodies, it is reasonable to believe that most could serve to guide principles for an organization such as ITAA.

The following advantages were noted by the taskforce:
- Enhances the status of the program in the university community. Prestige. Viewed positively by administration. Seen as a stamp of approval on graduates, indicating readiness to practice at a certain level.
- Protects the interests of students, their parents, the academic institution and potential employers by ensuring that educational programs offered have attained a level that meets or exceeds standards that were developed by experts in the field.
- Marketing/competitive advantage.
- Provides an external validation of quality that assists in the recruitment of both students and faculty members.
- May serve as leverage for administration to hear your needs. A lobbying tool at budget time to justify increased funding.
- Establish goals and benchmarks in relation to peer institutions; allow comparisons among institutions regarding learning outcomes and other performance measures; can created databases for benchmarking reports containing salary, enrollment, financial, demographic, mission, and other types of data that contribute to strategic improvements.[1]

 The taskforce also noted the following disadvantages:

- Increased costs to the program.
- Standards sometimes penalize programs that do not meet the "norm."
- Diversity of programs represented in ITAA.

An additional concern might be the perception of interference with autonomy, as well as the feeling that another layer of bureaucracy has been added.

The taskforce was not equipped to resolve the cost/benefit issue; however, included in this document is information concerning cost issues that must be considered as well as data on the cost of operating several programmatic accrediting organizations.

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[1] Other relevant advantages are found in the reference list.

A.   Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requirements

While one charge to the taskforce is to research CHEA requirements, it should be noted that an accrediting body applies for CHEA's recognition only after it is in full operation and has completed the accreditation process for at least one program/institution.

CHEA RECOGNITION PURPOSES AND REQUIREMENTS

1. CHEA recognition of accrediting organizations has three basic purposes:

- TO ADVANCE ACADEMIC QUALITY. To confirm that accrediting organizations have standards that advance academic quality in higher education; that those standards emphasize student achievement and high expectations of teaching and learning, research, and service; and that those standards are developed within the framework of institutional mission.

- TO DEMONSTRATE ACCOUNTABILITY. To confirm that accrediting organizations have standards that assure accountability through consistent, clear, and coherent communication to the public and the higher education community about the results of educational efforts. Accountability also includes a commitment by the accrediting organization to involve the public in accreditation decision making.

- TO ENCOURAGE, WHERE APPROPRIATE, SCRUTINY AND PLANNING FOR CHANGE AND FOR NEEDED IMPROVEMENT. To confirm that accrediting organizations have standards that encourage institutions to plan, where appropriate, for change and for needed improvement; to develop and sustain activities that anticipate and address needed change; and to stress student achievement.

2. CHEA acknowledges, respects, and is committed to the enhancement of the mission of accrediting organizations. CHEA has responsibility to advance, through the recognition process, the quality and public understanding of accreditation and of recognized accrediting organizations.

3. CHEA's primary focus is quality assurance and quality improvement. Accrediting organizations that seek CHEA recognition must demonstrate the quality of their activities and the pertinence and value of their activities to higher education and the public interest.

4. Accrediting organizations seek to demonstrate that they meet CHEA eligibility and recognition standards.

CHEA ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

ELIGIBILITY. To be eligible for CHEA recognition, the accreditation organization:

A. demonstrates that the organization's mission and scope are consistent with the CHEA *Institutional Eligibility and Recognition Policy* , including that a majority of the institutions and programs accredited by the organization grant higher education degrees. The *Policy* provides, in part, that the recognition process will place increasing emphasis on the effectiveness of accrediting organizations in assuring academic quality of institutions or programs;

B. is non-governmental;

C. accredits institutions or programs in institutions that have legal authority to confer higher education degrees, whether U.S. or non-U.S. institutions;[2]

D. accredits institutions or programs at generally accepted higher education levels;

E. has written procedures that describe, officially and publicly:
1. the organization's decision-making processes, policies, and procedures that lead to accreditation actions, and
2. the scope of accreditation that may be granted, evaluative criteria (standards or characteristics) used, and levels of accreditation status conferred;

F. has procedures that include a self-evaluation by the institution or program and on-site review by a visiting team, or has alternative processes that CHEA considers to be valid;

G. demonstrates independence from any parent entity, or sponsoring entity, for the conduct of accreditation activities and determination of accreditation status; and

H. is operational, with more than one completed accreditation review, including action by the accreditation decision-making body at each degree level, or for each type of program, identified in the statement of proposed recognized scope of accreditation.

B. Process associated with becoming / creating an accrediting body

The process below is contingent upon the decision to establish an accrediting body.

1. Develop a strategic vision of what the accrediting body should look like. This strategic vision might include the mission and purpose of accreditation. Both CHEA and the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) recommend that the decision is made from the beginning to establish a structure in line with CHEA's requirements such that when the time comes for recognition as an accrediting body, requirements are already met.

2. Select/appoint a commission/committee/taskforce to develop: 1) a governance structure for the accrediting body; 2) policies and procedures for accreditation; and 3) standards and criteria for accreditation. When developing standards and criteria for accreditation,

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[2] **For non-U.S. institutions in countries in which legal authority to award degrees is not available, the accrediting organization meets this requirement if it demonstrates that it accredits only those institutions that have standing and significant support in the local community or other communities of interest, e.g., well-known professional organizations and other respected entities that support the institution.**

those developing such should include persons representing the various content areas, as well as stakeholders, e.g., industry representatives.

3. Both CHEA and ASPA require that the accrediting body has written procedures that describe officially and publicly:

- the organization's decision-making processes, policies, and procedures that lead to accreditation actions,
- the scope of accreditation that may be granted, evaluative criteria (standards or characteristics) used, and levels of accreditation status conferred,
- procedures that include a self-evaluation by the institution or program and on-site review by a visiting team, and,
- the accrediting body's independence from the parent body for the conduct of accreditation activities.

4. The taskforce thought it might be helpful to provide an example of a structure in which the accrediting body is independent of the parent body for the conduct of accreditation activities. Carol Anderson, Director of Accreditation, AAFCS shared the following: The Senate of the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) vested the accreditation activities of the Association in the Council for Accreditation (CFA). The CFA is composed of 10 voting members: six representatives from accredited Units elected by the Collegiate Assembly (CA); two practicing professionals; and two representatives of the public, nominated by the CFA and appointed by the AAFCE President. A member of the AAFCS Board of Directors, selected by the AAFCS President, serves as liaison between the CFA and the Board of Directors, participating in all Council meetings without voting privileges.

C. Costs associated with becoming/creating an accrediting body

In considering costs, factors such as costs related to special meetings to create the accrediting body such as travel for the committee or conference calls, etc., must be considered. Costs may be lowered by meeting in conjunction with ITAA or Council. It is realistic to assume that there will need to be some special meetings held for the committee or taskforce working to get the accrediting body established. These costs would most likely come from ITAA.

Once the accrediting body is established, the costs associated with running the organization are generated by those programs pursing accreditation, in addition to annual sustaining fees paid by programs already accredited. The cost of operating the accrediting body might be lowered by using volunteers[3] where possible and employing a very small staff. This is the norm for programmatic accrediting organizations (See for example Table 1). For example, according to the Director of Accreditation for the AAFCS Council for Accreditation (CFA), CFA receives a very small proportion of its operation budget from AAFCS. The proportion received was not shared. CFA has three part-time employees and 100 volunteers. Operating budgets for four accrediting bodies, including AAFCS, as well as associated accreditation fees are included in

Table 1.

Table 1. Four Accrediting Bodies and Accreditation Fees

Organization	Amer. Assoc. of Family and Consumer Sc.	Council for Interior Design Accreditation	American Dietetic Association	Amer. Assoc. for Marriage &Fam. Therapy
# Programs accredited	49	172	420	113
#Employees	3 Part-time	4 full-time; 1 part-time	10 full-time	2 Full-time; 1 part-time
Volunteers[3]	100	135	115	270
Operating Budget	$76,015	$619,550	$1,210,031	$298,425
Source: *Quality Review: Council for Higher Education Accreditation 2011. (2012). CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review. Washington, DC*.				
Accreditation Fees				
Application for Accreditation (initial)	$500.00	$400.00	$500.00	$850.00
Site Visit	$3,500. Plus, host site pays for food, lodging, and local transport while on site.	$3,000.00 Adm. + $600.00 per site visitor (usually 3 people)+ food, lodging, etc. @ host site.	$5,940. Cover all expenses including travel, lodging and per diem for two team members for on-site visit.	$4,300.00 (No additional information)
Annual Sustaining fee	Based on # of graduates per yr. Max. to date $1,925.00	$2,000.00 (Beginning 2013)	$1,450.00 Scheduled $1K increase per. Yr. through 2016 which will be $1,850	$350.00
Note: Accreditation Fee data were taken from the four organizations websites				

An additional cost to consider is for hiring a consultant to assist with developing standards or working with the commission/taskforce/committee in developing policies, etc. Costs might be as much as $425.00 per hour, although consultants might discount nonprofit groups by 10-15%. Costs can be cut by using volunteer experts in content areas where ever possible, and using consultants only in an advisory capacity.

Once an accrediting body is fully established and has accredited several programs/institutions it is eligible to apply for CHEA recognition. The "applicant organization" pays a $2,000.00 fee which covers all costs related to the recognition review.

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[3] Volunteers include those <u>available</u> to serve on decision-making bodies, task forces, committees or as site visitors whether receiving honoraria or not. **Source**: CHEA Almanac of External Quality Review *2011. (2012).*Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Washington, DC.

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Appendix : **Fundamental Characteristics of Accreditation**

The Commission on Colleges adheres to the following fundamental characteristics of accreditation:

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.
- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.
- Accreditation is a form of self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.
- Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment to the concept of quality enhancement through continuous assessment and improvement.
- Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governing structure designed to promote institutional integrity, autonomy, and flexibility of operation.
- Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.

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