

Accreditation's Value Proposition Is Tested and Tempered

By Dr. Al Gray, Executive Director and CEO, ACICS

Based on Dr. Gray's report at the ACICS Centennial Conference and Leadership Gala, November 2012.

ACICS' focus on advancing excellence in career and professional education intensified during 2012, in part because of scrutiny and expectations expressed repeatedly and forcefully by policymakers, funding sources, regulatory authorities and the media. ACICS met those challenges by strengthening its commitment to the "accreditation loop" of continuous quality improvement.

The "loop" is driven by two primary value propositions: the value of accreditation to the public, and the value of accreditation to the colleges and schools.

For the public, value comes from improved educational outcomes, keeping students informed, educating and training a workforce that is relevant to today's emerging employment opportunities, staying economically competitive, and exhibiting stewardship of public funds.

For the institutions, the value is derived from planning for quality and performance improvement, discipline in the use of benchmarking, enhanced credibility and accountability with third-party observers, the

recognition of excellence, and approval by the government of programs essential to survival.

ACICS' contribution to those value propositions required expanded staff

ACICS also intensified its defense of standards and protocols before federal and state policymakers, regulatory bodies, community forums and employers.

capacity. The 45 professionals include 29 dedicated to the development of standards, the methods for measuring compliance with standards, and the application of those yardsticks of excellence to colleges and schools. That application occurred through 840 visit days in 2012 (compared to 755 in

Key Operating Statistics

Top Programs by Number Offered at ACICS Institutions

Business Administration and Management	1,280
Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement	746
Medical/Clinical Assistant	686
Accounting	567
Legal Assistant/Paralegal	525
Medical Office Assistant	346
Information Technology	342
Massage Therapy	335
Medical Administrative Assistant	333
Administrative Assistant	323

2011) at more than 300 institutions accredited by ACICS, and on behalf of more than 800,000 students enrolled.

A good deal of that accreditation activity was applied to 22 institutions that were awarded initial grants by ACICS, from California to Florida, from Canada to Antigua.

The growth of the ACICS community of excellence was also manifest in greater demand for the review of new programs, additional locations, non-traditional delivery modalities, and other institutional changes. Assuring the integrity of those changes required the delivery of a greater number of workshops and webinars—knowledge sharing that helps institutions prepare for the rigor and intensity of accreditation review.

ACICS also intensified its defense of standards and protocols before federal and state policymakers, regulatory bodies, community forums and employers. In 2012, that defense included more outreach to community forums and groups of employers through presentations of the “Workforce Skills Reality Check” to meetings in Sacramento, Phoenix, Louisville and Washington, D.C.

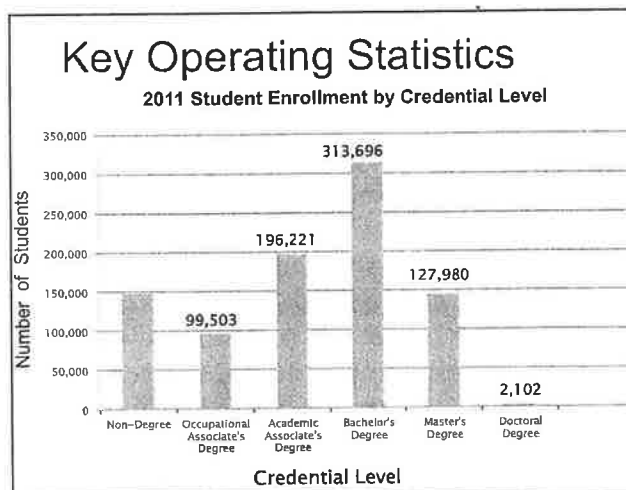
Those interactions helped to clarify the dynamic expectations confronting the sector. As listed below, they summarize the public environment in which accredited career colleges and schools operate and serve students:

- Greater accountability is expected for retention, graduation and placement at the program level and campus level.
- The credibility of self-reported data, not periodically verified through an independent audit, is suspect.
- Methods of verification are the subject of debate by policymakers.

- Accreditation benchmarks for rates of placement and retention are also under scrutiny by a wide array of stakeholders who do not own or operate career colleges and schools.

Those expectations and more were operative as ACICS worked to maintain its recognition as a reliable authority on institutional quality and integrity. The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) awarded ACICS a new grant of recognition. ACICS completed and submitted a compliance report to the Accreditation and State Liaison Division of the Office of Post-Secondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education as part of the journey toward re-recognition by the federal government. ACICS expects to complete that journey in 2013.

ACICS offered perspective to balance a key Congressional report dealing with the sector in general, and education quality in particular. “The Quality Assurance at Career Colleges and Schools” report was sent to Congressional offices and the Department of Education to provide a more



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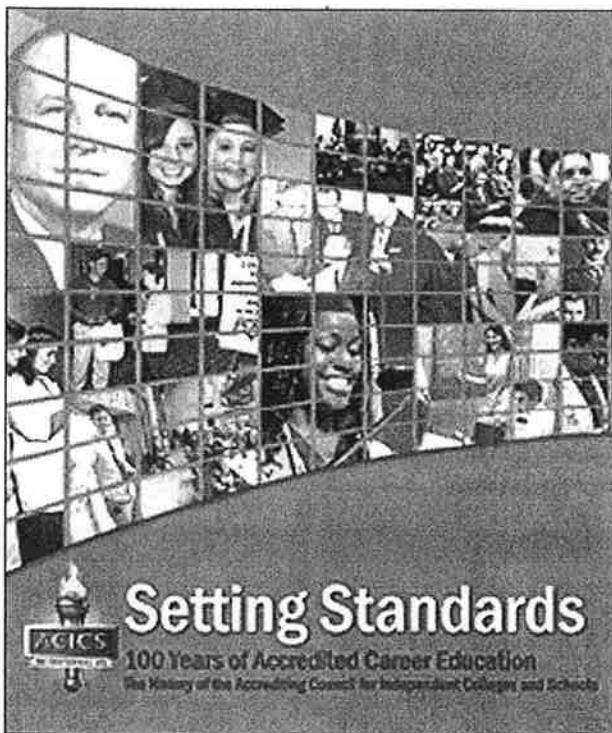
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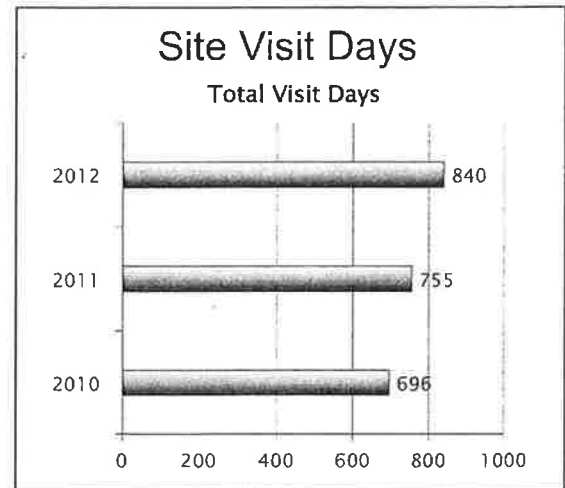
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complete record of how specific education quality issues are addressed by ACICS.

Enhancing the accreditation value proposition also required additional investment in and deployment of information technology. Member institutions now have better ability to initiate an application online, enhanced application purchasing options, upload one document for multiple locations (cloning), track multiple applications and access automatic invoicing when the purchase exceeds a certain threshold. Likewise, the technology platform supporting the accreditation program was strengthened through an improved student survey, enhancements to the Campus Accountability and Annual Financial reporting systems, enhancements to the visit management module of Personify, and a new module to manage and track complaints and adverse information.



To celebrate the Centennial, ACICS produced *Setting Standards: 100 Years of Accredited Career Education*, a newly illustrated volume by Virginia author Bob Cohen. *Setting Standards* illustrates the motivation behind self-governance and voluntary quality assurance of private career colleges and schools. While the history describes many aspects of an evolving, national organization with many functions related to membership, the core enterprise was and is the assurance of educational quality and the preservation of institutional integrity.



The Council initiated and adopted substantial and significant changes to the ACICS Criteria. Those changes strengthened a wide array of quality indicators, including program-level standards for student achievement, program compliance warnings, the monitoring of excessive substantive changes, transfer of credit, federal credit hour definition, and more.

The Board adopted changes in the by-laws that expand participation by public and academic members on the Council, and facilitate voting by institutions under a common ownership structure.

In conclusion, the forces and waves of changes that the organization confronted this past year define the challenges for ACICS in 2013. In an environment of growth – driven by demand for access to economic opportunity through employment – ACICS will fortify its efforts to defend against negative perceptions and uninformed criticism. The outreach to state and federal policymakers must expand to fill the void of misunderstanding that often afflicts the quality assurance discussion. And the priority of developing and managing talent effectively will complement the ongoing commitment to improving our process and program of quality assurance, whenever and wherever possible.

With wishes to all for a prosperous and successful New Year....

ACICS CENTENNIAL CONFERENCE

The Cosmopolitan
Las Vegas, Nevada
November 8-11, 2012

Keynote Presentations



Keynote presentation by **Burck Smith**, president and CEO of StraighterLine, masterfully detailed the disruptive forces at work in higher education today.



Jugglers with a message and a lot of fun.

Centennial Gala

The gala evening had the feeling of a family reunion bringing together career college leaders from past decades.



Members of the PERC group in attendance included: *Front row L to R: Loren Rhude, Joe Lee, Al Sullivan; Back row L to R: Scott Rhude, Larry Schumacher, Jim Hutton, Jack Yena, Don Jones, Gerald Phillips, Ken Konesco, Dean Johnston, and John Huston.*



ACICS' "Lifetime Achievement Award" was presented to **Dr. Thomas B. Duff** by **Roger Swartzwelder** (background).

Dynamic Speakers – Great Information

