

# Professional Organizations and Equivalence

## Professional Services Division

### October 2007

#### Overview of this Report

This item begins a discussion of how to coordinate accreditation activities for programs that also seek professional or national accreditation. Section 7 of the DRAFT Accreditation Framework addresses this topic from the policy standpoint, but the procedural issues still remain to be addressed by the COA.

#### Staff Recommendation

This is an information item.

#### Background

The topic of national accreditation of a credential program can be viewed through two distinct questions:

- 1) Can a program use the national organization's standards in lieu of the Commission's adopted program standards?
- 2) Can a program substitute the national organization's accreditation activity/status/finding in lieu of some part of the Commission's accreditation activities?

Education Code 44374 (f) provides for the option of a program or institution to substitute national or professional accreditation for the Commission's accreditation activities. But this ability to 'substitute' is restricted by the conditions delineated in the *Accreditation Framework*.

The DRAFT Accreditation Framework, Section 7B (page 28) provides the following language related to national accreditation of a credential program.

#### B. National Accreditation of a Credential Program

1. The accrediting entity agrees to use the adopted California Program Standards for the specific credential under Option 1, or the standards used by the national entity are determined by the Committee to be equivalent to those adopted by the Commission under Option 1.
2. The accreditation team represents ethnic and gender diversity.
3. The accreditation team includes both postsecondary members and elementary and secondary school practitioners; a minimum of one voting member is from California.
4. The period of accreditation is consistent with a seven-year cycle and is compatible with the accreditation activities established by the state.
5. Nationally accredited credential programs participate in the unit accreditation process. The national accreditation of the program serves in lieu of the state's Program Assessment process.

Previous to the revision of the Accreditation Framework, there were instances where a professional organization's standards were deemed equivalent to the adopted program standards. Once equivalence was granted, a program could choose to write to the professional or national standards instead of the adopted California standards. But there has not been a simple substitution of the national or professional organizations accreditation in lieu of the Commission's.

The recommendations from the Accreditation Study Work Group and the COA regarding national accreditation of credential programs were partially addressed in recommendation #6:

*Topic 6: Establish consistency in the system by including all Credential and Certificate Programs in the Accreditation Process*

*Preferred Option:* Adopt the general principle that all programs that lead to a credential or certificate in California should be reviewed on a periodic basis and that the review process should be implemented in a manner that recognizes program differences but maintains comparable rigor across program types.

Specifically on the topic of national program accreditation, the work group and COA were in consensus that all programs must satisfy all the Commission's accreditation requirements. Following is language from the Work Group's Options Matrix related to national accreditation:

All California programs must participate in the California accreditation process.

California supports national program accreditation when the national program review can be coordinated with the California process\*\*\*

(National organizations may do the preliminary work of determining alignment of national standards to California standards, but the COA will review all standards for comparability.)

\*\*\* indicated consensus among the members of the work group and the COA.

### **Next Steps:**

A number of questions need to be discussed by the COA to allow procedures to be developed for national or professional accreditation to be coordinated with the Commission's accreditation system. Some of the important questions are listed below:

- 1) What procedures should the COA implement to allow programs the options allowed to them by the Education Code?
- 2) How should program standards from national or professional organizations be reviewed for equivalence to California's adopted program standards?
- 3) Who should be responsible for initiating a review of standards for equivalence?
- 4) How can national or professional accreditation be coordinated with i) Biennial Reports, ii) Program Assessment, and iii) Site visits?

After COA's discussion of this item at the October meeting, staff will bring this topic back to the COA at the January 2008 meeting.