



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

To: Higher Education Committee
From: John L. D'Agati 
Subject: Update on Renewal of the Recognition of the Board of Regents and Commissioner as an Accrediting Agency
Date: June 11, 2012

Authorizations:

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

This item is an update on activities related to the renewal of the Board's recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education as an accrediting agency for New York institutions of higher education.

Reason(s) for Consideration

For information.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the Higher Education Committee for discussion at its June 2012 meeting.

Background Information

The Board of Regents has been engaged in the evaluation of quality in higher education in New York State since 1787. The federal government has recognized the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education as a national institutional accrediting agency since 1952. New York is the only state with this recognition. The U.S. Secretary of Education (Secretary) last renewed this recognition in August 2007 for a period of five years. At its January 2012 meeting, the Board of Regents affirmed its commitment to seek renewal of its accrediting authority. This report provides an update on accreditation-related activities.

Recent Activities (2012)

- On February 27, the Regents Advisory Council on Institutional Accreditation (**RAC**) and Department staff hosted an accreditation-standards review meeting in New York City, inviting representatives from all Regents-accredited institutions. The review highlighted the proposed changes to accreditation standards (adopted by the Regents last month) and featured staff-led discussions of each accreditation standard. Institutions posed questions to staff, who clarified the application of the standards and noted any suggestions for improvement. No substantive changes were developed.
- On March 22, I and a member of the accreditation team met with representatives of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), including the analyst who will review the Board's renewal application. USDE staff provided insight on the application review process. They emphasized the importance of documenting the application of Regents accreditation standards.
- On March 30, the RAC and Department staff hosted a colloquium in Albany focused on distance education and library resources. Featured speakers addressed those topics and took questions from an audience of representatives of Regents-accredited institutions and others.
- This spring, staff conducted site visits to three institutions seeking renewal of accreditation by the Regents. Staff traveled with teams of peer reviewers to assess these institutions' compliance with Regents accreditation standards, following the submission of self-studies.
- The Commissioner appointed a new public member to the RAC, Dr. James Hayward, President and CEO of Applied DNA Sciences, Inc. (Stony Brook).
- On May 17, the RAC met to consider and make recommendations on applications for renewal submitted by Utica School of Commerce and Christie's Education, Inc. Those recommendations are scheduled to be acted on by the Board this month.
- Staff developed a five-part Webinar series as a training and reference resource for peer reviewers and Board members. The Webinars address accreditation standards, site visits, and the decision-making process. They are available at <http://www.highered.nysesd.gov/ocue/accred/SVResources.htm>.
- On May 22, the Board adopted amendments to conform its Rules on accreditation to federal requirements for accreditors. The updates, which took effect this month, establish definitions for distance education, correspondence education, and teach-out plans; set requirements for verifying the identity of distance and correspondence education students; and address the need to publish transfer-of-credit policies, among other changes.

- The Department submitted its application to USDE on June 4 to renew the accrediting authority of the Board and Commissioner of Education. Through an online application process, we described our compliance with federal standards and uploaded documents to support our statements.

Next Steps (2012)

We anticipate the following will occur during the remainder of the calendar year:

- The USDE analyst will review our application to renew the accrediting authority of the Board of Regents and Commissioner. The analyst may have questions or feedback to which the Department will have an opportunity to respond.
- The USDE analyst may observe decision-making activities, such as the review of accreditation applications by the RAC and Board of Regents. In addition, the analyst may visit our offices to review accreditation records and accompany staff on site visits to observe an accreditation team at work.
- In response to changes to Regents Rules, staff will update the *Handbook of Institutional Accreditation* and training materials to provide guidance to institutions and peer reviewers.
- Staff will observe the June meeting of National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQL), in preparation for the Department's appearance before the Committee in the fall.
- Over the course of the next several months, staff will conduct three or more site visits to institutions seeking initial or applying for renewal of Regents accreditation.
- Fall RAC and Regents meetings will consider initial and renewal applications for accreditation.
- It is expected that in December (date to be determined), NACIQL will consider the application to renew the Board's recognition as an accrediting agency.

The proceedings typically include a presentation by the USDE analyst who reviewed the given application; questions of the staff analyst by Committee members; comments by agency representatives; questions of agency representatives by Committee members; and consideration of comments from third parties (if any). Committee members then vote on a proposed accreditation action.

The Secretary or his designee then renders a decision within 90 days of the NACIQL meeting. The maximum term of recognition is five years.

Recommendation

This item is for information; no action is necessary.