Plenary Session V: Regulating the Other Institutions – State, Federal, and Accrediting Perspectives

Tuesday, May 17, 2011
10:30 am - noon
Stanford East
As both the online delivery of education and the prevalence of for-profit institutions have grown, so too has the interest in assuring that they serve the public good. Of particular interest, whether legitimate or not, has been a general concern that the rapid growth in institutions and students participating in online and for-profit institutions may lead to issues regarding the quality of instruction being provided and with respect to consumer protection. Over the last couple of years, these concerns have become manifested in considerable press attention, Congressional studies, federal regulations, issues regarding state oversight, and heightened attention to the accreditation of for-profit and online providers.

This is not a new area of interest or concern. In the mid 1980s, the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) conducted a major research and policy analysis effort to seek ways in which state agencies around the country could work more effectively together to reduce the burden of gaining state approval for out-of-state institutions operating beyond their home ground, while also assuring reasonable, appropriate, and sometimes differing state perspectives of quality assurance for this array of educational providers. That effort preceded the evolution of the Internet and the broad use of technology-enabled instruction; at that time the rapid expansion of for-profit providers into multicampus/multistate campuses was the concern. Later, at the federal level, with the 1992 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, much attention was focused on the quality of all postsecondary institutions, along with consumer protection, but with special focus on the rapidly growing for-profit sector. Out of that act emerged substantial efforts to enhanced institutional quality assurance through what is known as the federal TRIAD. The TRIAD is the partnership between the federal government (which is to focus on assuring institutional financial viability), the accrediting community (which is to focus on institutional educational quality assurance), and the states (which are to focus on consumer protection).

With the advent of online learning, however, the opportunity for institutions, both public and private, to reach beyond their traditional geographic boundaries, expanded the opportunity to reach new students in new ways. And with this rapid expansion have come new issues with respect to how best to oversee these activities. For states this has raised issues about how, and even whether to, oversee the efforts of out-of-state institutions delivering online instruction within their borders. And for institutions that reach out to serve students around the country, this has raised issues about how to manage the
often diverse state regulatory environments in the various jurisdictions in which they provide service.

In this session our speakers will discuss the regulation of these activities from the federal perspective, as well as the issues facing accreditation as it attempts to be responsive to new entrepreneurial approaches to the delivery of education, while also being the watchdog for the quality of the postsecondary enterprise writ large. In addition, WICHE’s Russ Poulin will share the results of recent survey work WCET has conducted that describes the amazing array of ways in which the 50 states oversee state approval of institutions to operate within their bounds.

Speakers: David Bergeron, deputy assistant secretary for policy, planning and innovation for the Office of Postsecondary Education in the United States Department of Education; Russell Poulin, deputy director, WCET; other speaker TBD

Facilitated Discussion on Accreditation and State Regulations

Facilitator: David Longanecker, president, WICHE

Biographical Information on the Speakers and Facilitator

David Bergeron is the deputy assistant secretary for policy, planning, and innovation for the Office of Postsecondary Education in the United States Department of Education. In this position he is responsible for the program budget for the federal postsecondary education programs administered by the Office of Postsecondary Education and Federal Student Aid, which exceeded $15 billion in fiscal year 2010 and generates more than $145 billion in financial aid to more than 14 million students enrolled at public and private postsecondary institutions. Bergeron is also responsible for legislative, regulatory, and other policies affecting the department’s postsecondary education programs, including federal student aid. In this capacity he has led key policy groups working on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act; researched market-based approaches to loan subsidies under the guaranteed loan programs; and approved program regulations and other policy guidelines. Prior to joining the department, Bergeron received his bachelor’s of arts in political science and sociology from the University of Rhode Island and worked for a bank in consumer loans.

David A. Longanecker has served as the president of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in Boulder, CO, since 1999. Previously, Longanecker served for six years as the assistant secretary for postsecondary education at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to that he was the state higher education executive officer (SHEEO)
in Colorado and Minnesota. He was also the principal analyst for higher education for the Congressional Budget Office. Longanecker has served on numerous boards and commissions. He has written extensively on a range of higher education issues. His primary interests in higher education are: expanding access to successful completion for students within all sectors of higher education, promoting student and institutional performance, assuring efficient and effective finance and financial aid strategies, and fostering effective use of educational technologies, all for the purpose of sustaining the nation’s strength in the world and increasing quality of life for all Americans, particularly those who have traditionally been left out in the past. He holds an Ed.D. from Stanford University, an M.A. in student personnel work from George Washington University, and a B.A. in sociology from Washington State University.

Russ Poulin is deputy director, research and analysis, for WCET (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies), a cooperative association of institutions, vendors, and educational stakeholders looking to advance excellence and accelerate adoption of innovative technology-enhanced teaching and learning practices and policies in higher education. Poulin organizes information-sharing activities among WCET’s members. Recently, he has led national responses on new federal distance education regulations regarding “state authorization” and “last day of attendance.” Poulin directs the Transparency by Design project and its CollegeChoicesforAdults.org website, which provides consumer information for adult learners. He also coordinates WCET’s efforts in sharing information about the management, financing, and services of e-learning consortia; directs WCET role with the Campus Computing Project on the new Managing Online Education survey; and consults on WICHE’s Adult College Completion Network. Previously, Poulin coordinated distance education activities for the North Dakota University System. He holds a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and economics from the University of Colorado Denver and a master’s in statistics and research methodology from the University of Northern Colorado.

Adjournment