

Education Accreditation Under Fire

Policy for certifying universities reviewed

By LAURA YOUNGS
Staff Writer

The U.S. House has asked a congressional subcommittee to review a report opposing the accreditation of higher education institutions.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which released the report Sept. 30, was co-founded in 1995 by Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., and Lynne Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney.

The House Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness met Oct. 1 to address the ACTA report and discuss the role of accreditation in post-secondary education, but no conclusion was reached.

The original post-secondary accreditation process was designed a century ago as an optional evaluation to determine which schools met key educational criteria.

The Higher Education Act of 1952 designated six independent regional agencies to handle the accreditation of universities.

In order to receive federal funding for need-based financial aid, colleges and universities must be accredited by

one of the regional agencies. A volunteer committee reviews schools, and if they do not meet criteria, they are given a warning.

If schools still fail to comply, they are put on probation. As a last resort, schools are removed from the accreditation list entirely.

But George Leef, director of higher education policy at ACTA and co-author of the study, said there are flaws with the system.

Leef said the accreditation system does not focus on the overall outcome of students' education and called for the elimination of the program.

The report also suggested a system in which schools were accredited by individual states.

Accreditation agencies often focus more on resources such as libraries and facilities instead of the quality of education students receive, Leef said.

"Many students graduate ... with what you would call an education in name only," he said.

He added that many college students have poor reading, writing and math skills and that a rising number of graduates are taking high-school-level jobs — a phenomenon Leef attributes to improper accreditation.

But James Rogers, executive director of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, said Leef's report is flawed.

The association is charged with accrediting Southern institutions from Virginia to Texas — including schools in North Carolina.

Rogers said that even if the regional accreditation system were eliminated, it would merely be replaced by another one.

He added that allowing each state to have its own accreditation criteria, as suggested in the report, would be a logistical nightmare.

"I didn't see any viable solutions," Rogers said. "You're talking about a major change in structure."

He said the accreditation system has inherent value.

Accreditation helps schools attract students and faculty and ensures the transferability of credits between colleges, Rogers said.

Bernadette Gray-Little, executive associate provost at UNC, also said the accreditation system is an important process to universities.

"Accreditation is seen as necessary for the university because of external bodies," she said. "For most people who have participated in accreditation, the primary benefit is in the self-study the university conducts in preparation for the review."

Rogers also said that the system keeps colleges and universities in check and that the entire higher education community "keeps the pressure" on institutions with sanctions.

But Rogers said the accreditation system can be improved. "We can always do better."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Stipend Prompts Change to Policy

By JENNY IMMEL
Staff Writer

Student Congress members closed a legislative loophole Oct. 1 to bar student organizations from compensating members for representation after it came to light that Speaker Pro Tem Matt O'Brien was receiving funds from the Interfraternity Council.

O'Brien, who represents District 17, said he received a \$150 scholarship from the IFC last year for his membership in student government.

The IFC scholarship was created last year to increase fraternity involvement in all areas of student government and to assist with his tuition, he said.

"The purpose of the scholarship was not to influence anyone's vote," he said. "As far as I know, no IFC-related issue has come up with Congress in the past two years."

O'Brien will not receive any money this year because of the new bill. O'Brien is president of the IFC.

Speaker Tony Larson proposed the bill Oct. 1 after O'Brien brought the scholarship to his attention. Larson said he does not know of any other Congress member receiving money.

"We don't want people getting paid to be on student government by other organizations," Larson said.

He added that O'Brien's position in Congress is not in jeopardy. "I don't believe it was an ethics violation at the time."

O'Brien said he and Larson wanted to end the practice to prevent possible future wrongdoings.

The bill originally proposed by Larson would have banned all forms of funding, including stipends from student organizations.

But members added an amendment sponsored by Graduate and Professional Student Federation representatives excluding funds members receive from GPSF because it is a part of student government and not an outside organization.

"You couldn't be paid for serving on student government, but the Congress certainly has the right to receive stipends," Larson said.

Larson receives \$100 a month for his involvement with Student Congress.

The money students leaders receive from student government allows these representatives to devote time to student government that would otherwise be spent at a job, Larson said.

He proposed a similar bill for members of the executive branch, but the bill was sent to the Rules and Judiciary Committee for further discussion because members felt the wording was too general.

Blair Sweeney, the committee's chairman, said the bill needs to be clarified to make sure executive branch officers could still receive their stipends. The committee will meet Monday to discuss the bill, and Sweeney said he expects it to pass.

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.

Campus Calendar

Today

6 p.m. — Masala will hold a general body meeting. Come out and learn to model from cONeEpt of Colors.

7 p.m. — Caravan for Democracy and N.C. Hillel will host chief spokesman of the Embassy of Israel Mark Regev. A lecture, question-and-answer session and a reception will be held in 111 Carroll Hall. Please arrive by 6:30 p.m.

7 p.m. — The UNC Rotaract Club is hosting a speaker in Union 211. His name is Fred Keiger and he is the executive producer of ESPN. He will be speaking on his work with ESPN and briefly on the Civil War.

For the Record

In an Oct. 8 article titled "Officials Continue To Discuss Town Development Plan," Chapel Hill Planning Director Roger Waldon was misidentified as Robert Waldon.

In an Oct. 7 article titled "Leadership Conference Shows True Colors," it was incorrectly reported that Taylor Stone is the chairman of student government's public service committee. Kathleen Wirth is the chairwoman of the Public Service and Advocacy Committee of the executive branch of student government.

Also, Wirth was incorrectly identified as the STRETCH program organizer. Chad Fogleman was the program organizer.

The Daily Tar Heel regrets the errors.

The Daily Tar Heel

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STUDENT MEMBERSHIP

Student Member Day at Volleyball

UNC vs. Duke
Thursday, October 10, 7pm
Carmichael Auditorium

Student Members, join us as we cheer the Lady Tar Heels on as they face Dook Blue Devils. Stop by the Student Membership table to register for a chance to win one of many prizes. Gain extra chances of winning by wearing your Student Membership t-shirt. We will also be collecting pennies for the Dance Marathon.

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