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From: Belle S. Wheelan [bwheelan@sacscoc.org]
Sent: Monday, February 16, 2009 9:36 AM
To: CEOs of COC Institutions
Cc: Accreditation Liaisons
Subject: Integrity of the Baccalaureate Degree: 3+1 Programs

Dear Colleagues,

This communication is sent to you with a helpful intent – so please receive it in that spirit! I hope that you will follow-up and have discussions with your institution's academic leadership about these matters.

The Commission has received a number of inquiries about the concept of a 3+1 undergraduate degree program. I write now for the purpose of alerting you to some of the potential accreditation issues inherent in this concept.

First, what is a 3+1 educational program? As we understand the concept, it involves a two-year institution granting approximately 90 credit hours of course work which is then transferred into a four-year institution. The four-year institution subsequently grants approximately 30 credit hours of upper division course work and awards the baccalaureate degree. Also, sometimes this concept is used entirely within the same institution; that is, the institution permits students seeking a baccalaureate degree to take 90 credit hours of lower division courses and 30 credit hours of upper division courses.

Institutions considering the 3+1 concept should be prepared to “make their case” for compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*, particularly the following standards:

1. Section 1 (Integrity) – To what extent does the practice of using three years of lower division courses and only one year of upper division courses (3+1 verses 2+2) erode the academic integrity and quality of the baccalaureate degree.
1. CS 3.14 (Representation of accreditation status) – How does a two-year institution that is accredited to offer course work leading to an Associate degree (but not higher) assure that it is in compliance with these two standards when it offers 90 credit hours to its students and when the baccalaureate degree granting institution uses 30 of those credits as upper division work (these are two separate but related issues)?
1. CS 3.4.6 (Practices for awarding credit) – How do the involved institutions demonstrate that they are employing sound and acceptable practices for determining the level of credit awarded for courses? What is the fundamental difference between lower and upper division course credits?
1. CR 2.7.3 (General education) and CS 3.5.1 (College level competencies) – How will the baccalaureate degree granting institution assure that graduates have earned a minimum of 30 appropriate credits of general education and that graduates have been assessed to determine the extent to which they have attained the specified competencies?
1. CS 3.4.4 (Acceptance of academic credit), FR 4.2 (Program curriculum) and CR 2.7.2 (Program content) – How will the baccalaureate degree granting institution assure that transfer credits have learning outcomes comparable to the institution's own degree programs and that its degree programs embody a coherent course of study?

As final thoughts for your consideration: (a) the 3+1 concept may limit program majors to a maximum of 30 credit hours, eliminate or sharply truncate upper division electives, and preclude students from earning a minor unless they take more than the 120 semester hours for the baccalaureate degree; (b) each institution should work to protect the integrity of its degrees; and (c) you may want to confer with your programmatic accreditors to determine the impact of the 3+1 concept on their standards.

I welcome any feedback you'd like to share.

Sincerely,

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