



NEWS RELEASE

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“ACCREDITATION STANDS AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS AVAILABLE TO STRENGTHEN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION,” SAYS WW FOUNDATION PRESIDENT ARTHUR LEVINE

DATA ISSUES SHOULD ALSO DRIVE HEA REAUTHORIZATION: WW FOUNDATION’S PATRICK RICCARDS

Woodrow Wilson Foundation Offers Recommendations, Observations to U.S. Senate HELP Committee As It Prepares for the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

PRINCETON, N.J. (April 24, 2015) – As the U.S. Senate’s Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions begins its work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation has offered specific guidance on how the federal law governing postsecondary education could better address issues related both to accreditation and data.

Earlier this spring, U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, chairman of the HELP Committee, [invited comment on three major issues related to HEA reauthorization](#)—accreditation, risk sharing, and consumer information. Today, WW Foundation President Arthur Levine offered recommendations regarding ideas of accreditation, while WW Foundation Director Patrick Riccards provided observations regarding consumer information and higher education data collection.

“Accreditation stands as one of the most important tools available to strengthen postsecondary education,” Levine wrote. “Accreditation ultimately sets the standard for all colleges and universities to achieve. Underlying this standard, though, is the hope that all institutions of higher education will strive to exceed the standard, seeking the innovation and outcomes that will keep our position of having the strongest higher education system in the world.”

In his remarks, Levine provided background on the functions of accreditation, as well as how potential changes in higher education—such as student demographics and postsecondary providers—impact accreditation. Because of these potential changes, Levine offered a series of accreditation-focused recommendations for the U.S. Senate to consider, including the following:

- Expand the scope of institutions eligible for accreditation based more on student enrollment choices than institutional characteristics such as degree-granting status.
- Follow student academic careers to gauge the nature of their educational progress in a system in which they may study with multiple providers.
- Develop common standards for regional accrediting associations in order to avoid non-traditional providers shopping for the easiest possibility.
- Develop additional categories for accreditation—meets standards, exceeds standards, substantially exceeds standards—in order to go beyond the floor accrediting currently establishes, to aid institutions in capacity building, and to inform consumers.

- Place primary emphasis on the outcomes of postsecondary education, determining what data institutions should provide to regional accreditors and what information to the public.
- Plan for an outcome or competency-based system of postsecondary education.

“As a nation, we have long said that information is power, using the call for greater knowledge to rally support for education. But our educational infrastructure itself has not provided the powerful information we need,” Riccards noted to the HELP Committee. “Higher education has fallen short in its ability to both capture and apply data that can be used to improve how students learn, how they are taught, and how we measure it.”

In his remarks, Riccards cited the importance of outcome data to determine the success of a postsecondary education program, noting the Woodrow Wilson Foundation’s own commitment to outcomes as part of its Teaching Fellowship and MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership programs.

“All have a right to know the difference between a successful school of education and a not-so-successful one,” Riccards said. “That difference really can only be revealed through the collection, analysis, and utilization of outcome data. It is not enough to know that future teachers entering schools of education bring a certain high school class rank, GPA, or SAT/ACT score into the process. Yes, the inputs are important. But far more important is what they do with those tools. And we cannot measure that impact based simply on academic performance leading to the award of a college degree. It requires post-graduation data that can be tracked back to the degree-granting institution.”

Levine’s full remarks to the Senate HELP Committee can be found [here](#). Riccards’ full statement can be found [here](#).

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