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UNIT 4: SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION

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Welcome to Unit 4 of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation online preparation for your accreditation workshop. In this unit, we will discuss specialized accreditation.

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PREPARING FOR THE WORKSHOP



- Watch the seven preparation unit slideshows
 1. CEA's Mission
 2. Scope of Accreditation
 3. CEA's Values
 - ➔ 4. Specialized Accreditation
 5. Accreditation Process
 6. The CEA Standards
 7. Planning and Review
- Complete the worksheet for each unit
- Bring your questions to the workshop

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By now, you have worked your way through the first three units, and you understand CEA's mission and values, as well as the basics about the scope of accreditation.

If you have not yet downloaded the worksheet for Unit 4, please pause the slideshow and do that now. You may also like to download CEA's policies and procedures.

Keep your worksheet handy to note any questions or thoughts you have, even if they are not directly related to the questions we've asked you.

Now we're ready to talk about specialized accreditation!

ACCREDITING AGENCIES



- Provide an objective means for recognition
- Build confidence of students and the public
- Foster a culture of continued improvement and produce positive change



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Let's start with accrediting agencies themselves.

As you know, in the United States, there is no ministry of education or other overarching, government or industry-wide central planning office that mandates how educational programs and institutions are constructed or what programs they deliver or what outcomes they must achieve. Nonetheless, education organizations – from big universities delivering many programs for a variety of students, to smaller schools delivering focused training for a small group of selected students – all these educational organizations have the need to confirm their quality, to publicly establish that they have good academic programs and sound administrative practices, and to show that they provide students with the promised instruction and outcomes, and in some cases demonstrate compliance with various laws and regulations. So, how can U.S. ESL schools effectively demonstrate these qualities?

Yes, Accrediting agencies serve to accomplish these goals, with missions to develop effective quality assurance indicators and conduct reviews for their school types or academic discipline. Accreditation by established agencies becomes a way for students, their parents and sponsors, and others who need to know (such as SEVP!) that a school is sound and accountable.

Many accreditation systems follow the tradition of self-study, emphasizing reflection and improvement in addition to accountability, compliance, or meeting regulations of various sorts. So accrediting agencies typically include mechanisms that encourage or require regular review of practices, not simply achievement of a certification or license.

With so many different types of education organizations, you may be wondering what types of accrediting agencies exist.

TYPES OF ACCREDITING AGENCIES



Three types of agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education:

- Regional (WASC, SACS, and others)
- National (ACCET and others)
- Specialized (ABET, AACSB, and others)

CEA is a specialized accrediting agency.

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The U.S. Department of Education (or USDE) grants recognition to three types of accrediting agencies. Regional accrediting agencies accredit colleges and universities – there are seven of these – WASC, the Higher Learning Commission, SACS, and others. In the past these accreditors worked in defined regions, as the name implies. However, in 2020, the USDE ended regional boundaries for these accreditors. Then there are national accreditors – 10 or 11 of them – that accredit schools that provide a variety of programs or institutions in a variety of disciplines or content areas. For example, ACCET is a national accreditor.

And then there are the specialized accrediting agencies, which focus on a particular field, discipline, or content area. There are about 65 of these. CEA is a specialized accrediting agency. It only accredits English language programs in higher education settings.

Although there is no central authority, the U.S. government still has a stake in the quality of schools and educational programs that have a link to the federal government, and it relies on accrediting agencies to establish this accountability. The “federal link” for nearly all accrediting agencies except CEA is Title IV and other federal funding that flows to schools. For CEA, the federal link is to DHS, the Department of Homeland Security.

From its inception, CEA’s founders expected to seek recognition by the USDE, so that CEA could be an option for independent institutions to achieve the accreditation required to become SEVP certified. The Accreditation Act, as well as some state regulatory agencies and some non-governmental sponsoring organizations for example, require private schools to be accredited by an accreditor that is “recognized” by the USDE.

While programs don’t require specialized accreditation because they are covered by the accreditation of their institution for SEVP purposes, many programs have nonetheless chosen to pursue CEA

accreditation for the other reasons that it exists – as a mark of quality assurance, for program improvement and professional development, and for public recognition.

Let's look at what it means for CEA to be a specialized accreditor. We'll start with some of the characteristics of specialized accrediting agencies in general.

SPECIALIZED ACCREDITING AGENCIES



- Are developed by professional membership associations
- Show evidence of a maturing profession that wants to regulate itself
- Identify quality indicators and define the essence and core values of a field
- Rely on expertise of peers in the field



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The majority of specialized accrediting agencies have a particular kind of history.

The most typical platform for launching a quality assurance initiative is one that already exists in the field, and this is usually a professional membership organization (or group of organizations). Most grow out of a field that is maturing and professionalizing, and as a part of this evolution the field develops a need to regulate itself, and this leads to the need to discuss what the profession values and decide on standards and benchmarks. In fact, studies of what constitutes a “profession” cite a common body of knowledge, shared core values, characteristic practices that meet defined levels of organizational or practitioner competence, and principles of professional development and growth for members of the field.

In addition to this internal need for self-regulation and quality assurance, sometimes the field is also being pressed to regulate by outside forces.

And finally, given that they grow out of professional associations, you can see how many specialized accrediting agencies rely on expertise in the field and therefore come to be peer-developed and peer-driven.

Considering what we’ve discussed in Units 1, 2, and 3, and your own knowledge of CEA, I expect you can already see CEA in this description. This trajectory is exactly CEA’s story; CEA is, in fact, a prototypic specialized accrediting agency.

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CEA: A SPECIALIZED ACCREDITING AGENCY



- Growing field sought quality assurance through self-regulation

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Let me fill in some of the bits of information that may be missing from your picture of CEA’s growth as a specialized accrediting agency.

In the late 1980’s, as increasing numbers of international students entered the United States and more IEPs and ELPs emerged and grew, the need to identify principles of good practice and accountability mechanisms also grew. The field wanted to elevate its stature in the higher education arena and unify around quality indicators.

In addition, there was the practical matter that institutions (those private, non-campus-owned and operated schools we talked about in Unit 2) required accreditation by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in order to meet the requirements of the Accreditation Act to be certified to enroll F-1 students.

CEA: A SPECIALIZED ACCREDITING AGENCY



- Growing field sought quality assurance through self-regulation
- Established in the 1990s with input from TESOL, UCIEP, AAIEP, and NAFA



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CEA was initially formed in 1995 after a task force sponsored by TESOL. The task force comprised volunteer appointees from TESOL, UCIEP, AAIEP (which is now English USA), and NAFA's ATESL. It recommended that TESOL support forming an accrediting agency, which would serve to further professionalize the field and meet regulatory goals. TESOL did so, after which CEA formally separated from TESOL, as it is good practice for accreditors to be separate and independent from membership organizations in the field.

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CEA: A SPECIALIZED ACCREDITING AGENCY



- Growing field sought quality assurance through self-regulation
- Established in the 1990s with input from TESOL, UCIEP, AAIEP, and NAFLA
- Mission, values, and standards developed by the field



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As you remember from Unit 1, CEA’s mission and the Standards were developed in the 1990s by a group of volunteer senior professionals from across the IEP spectrum, with input from the field, to define principles of good practice in English language teaching and administration and to articulate the core values of our field. And those Standards are continually reviewed to ensure that they keep pace with trends and developments in our field.

If you are interested in more details of CEA’s development, please see the Introduction to the CEA Policies and Procedures, where the background is provided.

CEA: A SPECIALIZED ACCREDITING AGENCY



- Growing field sought quality assurance through self-regulation
- Established in the 1990s with input from TESOL, UCIEP, AAIEP, and NAFLSA
- Mission, values, and standards developed by the field
- Conducts accreditation through work of volunteer reviewers and commissioners in partnership with staff



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And if you weren't aware before you started on your accreditation journey, you now know that CEA is unquestionably peer-developed and peer-driven.

In sum, it is important to know that CEA was developed by the field, for the field, with representation from the range of programs and institutions that operate in our field, especially now that the Accreditation Act imposes on institutions an external requirement for CEA or ACCET accreditation. You and your peers from the field continue to be at the center of CEA's work: reviewing the standards, conducting site visits, and as Commissioners, making accreditation decisions, with support from the CEA staff.

RECOGNIZED ACCREDITING AGENCIES



Must undergo U.S. Department of Education review

- To have their policies and procedures externally evaluated
- To ensure that they meet U.S. federal regulations for accrediting agencies

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We mentioned at the beginning of this unit that specialized accrediting agencies are a type of agency recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. But we didn't really emphasize that "recognition" is another term that has a particular meaning in the U.S. accreditation arena. So what does it mean to be a "recognized" agency?

Well, for all accrediting agencies including CEA, the U.S. Department of Education conducts a formal review of the agency, applying federal regulations, to monitor and confirm that the agency is ensuring accountability and quality from their programs and institutions. Upon successful review, the Secretary of Education issues a letter that "recognizes" the agency.

The review an agency undergoes is very much like the one you are starting now, with federal regulations substituting for standards.

CEA: A RECOGNIZED ACCREDITING AGENCY

- Granted recognition in 2003 after thorough USDE review
- U.S. Department of Education recognition
 - Allows language training programs to be certified by SEVP to enroll international students
 - Provides evidence that CEA's policies and procedures have been externally evaluated and that CEA meets U.S. federal regulations for accrediting agencies

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As I'm sure you've concluded, CEA is a recognized specialized accrediting agency. CEA began accrediting programs in 1999 and achieved its initial U.S. Department of Education recognition in 2003.

In order to achieve and maintain USDE recognition, CEA periodically goes through a process very similar to the one you are about to undergo yourself.

So you can be sure that we understand just what we are asking of you. And you can be sure that our own policies and procedures have been externally evaluated and the USDE believes we are engaged in good practices as an accrediting agency.

And of course, if you achieve accreditation through CEA, your site can then be certified by SEVP to enroll international students.

REVIEW: SPECIALIZED ACCREDITATION



- What questions do you have about CEA, your accreditation process, or the Accreditation Act, if applicable?
- What are three advantages to having your organization accredited by a USDE-recognized specialized accreditor?
- How might you contribute in the future to the ongoing development of indicators, good practices, and values in English language teaching and programming?

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If you haven't been using your worksheet already, you may want to pull it out now.

Consider these review questions, jot down your answers, and write down your own questions and thoughts.

If you are interested in learning more about CEA's history and evolution, ways to volunteer with CEA, some of the finer points of USDE oversight, or more about CEA's position in the family of accreditors, please contact a CEA staff member.

QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS



Bring your questions and thoughts about specialized accreditation to the workshop or send them in advance to info@cea-accredit.org.



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As you look over your worksheet, remember – we’ll be ready to discuss at the workshop any questions you may have.

Thank you for your participation! When you are ready, you can move on to Unit 5: Accreditation Process.