

U.S. Department of Education Staff Report

to the

Senior Department Official on Recognition Compliance Issues

Recommendation Page

1. **Agency:** Distance Education Accrediting Commission (1959 / 2012)
(The dates provided are the date of initial listing as a recognized agency and the date of the agency's last grant of recognition.)
2. **Action Item:** Petition for Continued Recognition
3. **Current Scope of Recognition:** The accreditation of postsecondary institutions in the United States that offer degree and/or non-degree programs primarily by the distance or correspondence education method up to and including the professional doctoral degree, including those institutions that are specifically certified by the agency as accredited for Title IV purposes.
4. **Requested Scope of Recognition:** Same
5. **Date of Advisory Committee Meeting:** 06/20/2017
6. **Staff Recommendation:** Renew the agency's recognition for 5 years.
7. **Issues or Problems:** None

Executive Summary

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGENCY

The Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) accredits postsecondary institutions that offer programs primarily through distance education from the non-degree level through the professional doctoral degree. The agency currently accredits 76 postsecondary institutions within the United States. The agency also accredits high schools and non-U.S. institutions; however, those institutions are not included in the agency's federal scope of recognition. The agency's recognition enables its accredited postsecondary institutions that offer degree programs and have undergone an additional DEAC screening process to establish eligibility to participate in the U.S. Department of Education's Title IV federal student aid programs. The agency currently serves as the Title IV gatekeeper for 11 institutions and has nine additional institutions that are currently in the process of qualifying to participate in the Title IV programs.

Recognition History

DEAC has been listed as a federally recognized accrediting agency since 1959, when it was initially recognized as the National Home Study Council. In 1994, the agency's name was changed to the Distance Education and Training Council, and in 2015 its name was changed to the Distance Education Accrediting Commission.

The agency's last petition for continued recognition was reviewed at the Spring 2012 NACIQI meeting. As a result of that review, the agency's recognition was continued and it was requested to submit a compliance report on two issues. The agency's subsequent compliance report was reviewed and accepted at the Fall 2012 NACIQI meeting, at which time the agency's recognition was continued for a period of four and a half years. The agency submitted its next regularly scheduled petition for continued recognition in January 2017, and that petition is the subject of the current staff analysis.

PART II: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The agency meets the requirements of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition.

PART III: THIRD PARTY COMMENTS

Staff Analysis of 3rd Party Written Comments

The Department received three written third-party comments against the agency. The overarching concern raised in all three submissions was that the agency provides accreditation to for-profit institutions that do not participate in Title IV programs, but that do participate in programs such as the GI Bill that are funded through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The commenters stated that there have been numerous complaints against approximately five of these schools. The commenters stated that complaints have been submitted both to federal agencies and to veterans' organizations regarding these schools. The commenters expressed concern that the agency was not holding the schools to high enough standards and also expressed concerns related to the rigor of

the agency's newly established benchmarks. The benchmarks solely address graduation rates, and are currently set at 15% below the average.

The Department has no way of addressing the commenters concerns. Since the alleged complaints have been lodged with other agencies or organizations, the Department has no way of verifying their existence. Additionally, while the Department encourages agencies to set high outcomes measures/benchmarks, it does not have the regulatory authority to place any requirements on agencies in this regard. The Department thanks the commenters for taking the time to share their concerns with the staff, but has no way of incorporating them into the current analysis.

Agency Response to 3rd Party Written Comments

DEAC acknowledges the Department's receipt of and response to the three third party comment letters the Department received regarding DEAC. DEAC believes our petition and subsequent submission to the Department reflect the seriousness and care with which we address issues relating to both program quality and student achievement, as well as our ongoing efforts to monitor institutional performance and facilitate improvements in both areas. We have given careful attention to the third party comments filed by the Center for American Progress, Century Foundation and Veterans Education Success/Student Veterans of America. We take the concerns expressed in those comments very seriously .

We note that some of the issues raised by commenters have been the topic of extensive discussion within the field of higher education for some years, including by NACIQI at its last meeting. DEAC is working individually and with other accreditors, associations and institutions to further develop practices that foster student engagement and achievement levels in a diverse higher education environment.

Staff Analysis of Agency Reponse to 3rd Party Written Comments

The agency has acknowledged the concerns raised in the three third-party comments received by the Department related to DEAC's ongoing recognition. The agency notes that the issues raised in the comments have been the subject of ongoing discussion in the higher education community and that it continues to participate in discussions related to the commenters' concerns with other accreditors, associations, and institutions.