



COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

## Remarks by CCCU President on the Department of Education's Proposed Rulemaking<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for this opportunity to present today on these important topics. I am Shirley Hoogstra, the president of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities is a higher education association of more than 180 Christian institutions around the world, including over 140 in the US. The CCCU's mission is to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth. Our schools shape students who act for the public good—often at a cost to themselves—out of a love for Jesus Christ and for the world around them.

CCCU institutions enroll over 445,000 students each year, employ 72,000 faculty and staff, and count 3.5 million alumni. They are also all accredited, and our institutions value the peer accreditation process as a tool for constant refinement and improvement. There too are areas with accreditation itself that can be refined and improved.

We will be submitting detailed written comments next week, but I wanted to highlight a few specific areas today.

### First, the Department should clarify what it means for accrediting agencies to respect religious mission.

Currently, accrediting agencies are required to respect institutions' religious missions,<sup>2</sup> yet that term is undefined. This lack of definition risks accreditors interpreting inconsistently across accrediting bodies. Religious mission permeates our institutions' policies and practices, so we believe the Department should provide clarity with a definition like that in the PROSPER Act, which states:

The term 'religious mission' includes an institution of higher education's religious tenets, beliefs, or teachings, and any policies or decisions related to such tenets, beliefs, or teachings (including any policies or decisions concerning housing, employment, curriculum, self-governance, or student admission, continuing enrollment, or graduation).

### Second, the Department should clarify how it will enforce the requirement for accrediting agencies to respect religious mission.

Currently, should an accreditor not respect an institutions religious mission, the only remedy available to the Secretary is the draconian option of derecognizing the accreditor. This leaves the institution harmed and harms hundreds of other institutions at the same time. Institutions suffer

---

<sup>1</sup> These comments were delivered by CCCU President Shirley Hoogstra at the Department of Education's public hearing on September 6, 2018. They address the topics suggested in the department's Federal Register announcement from 7/31/2018 (Docket ID ED-2018-OPE-0076).

<sup>2</sup> (20 USC 1099b(a)(4)(A) and 34 CFR 602.18).



COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

even though the accreditor violated the law.

To address this deficiency, we recommend the rulemaking committee consider what process could be put into place within current law that achieve the goals of:

- First, **clarity** – the process must be clear and understandable to both the institution and accrediting agency.
- Second, **timeliness** – there are real harms that begin immediately as soon as accreditation is called into question, much less revoked, so resolution must be timely.
- Third, **certainty** – to ensure institutions have recourse, the process should *require* the Department to act, not simply allow it to act.
- And lastly, **restitution** – different types of accreditation are not necessarily equal or interchangeable, therefore, at the end of the process, the institution should be able to have its original accreditation status restored if that is determined to be the appropriate.

The third and final issue I will raise today is that the Department should give accrediting agencies and institutions the flexibility they need to innovate, reduce costs, and serve students in line with their unique missions.

We are pleased that the Department will propose regulations that promote innovation. In doing so, however, we urge the Department to retain its goal of protecting the integrity and efficacy of the student financial aid programs, as well as to strongly consider the value of institutional autonomy in these discussions.

The diversity of higher education institutions has contributed to the United States being the best in the world. Christian Higher Education and faith-based higher education generally is an important part of this diversity. Just today, in fact, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article noting that of the 11 institutions that ranked highest in student engagement, 8 of them were faith-based. Christian higher education produces committed, compassionate, convicted citizens who want to engage deeply in this world, not in spite of their faith, but because of their faith, and therefore we are grateful to the Department today for embarking on this process of ensuring that the mission of faith-based higher education is protected. Per the Establishment Clause, the government should neither favor, nor prevent, the inclusion of religion in higher education. Rather, in our marketplace of ideas, religious institutions of higher education should be allowed to compete on equal footing with their peers. We believe the measures outlined above achieve this by ensuring all institutions—including religious institutions—can have their missions and autonomy respected so they can best serve their students.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We look forward to dialoguing about these issues throughout the rulemaking process.