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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) is a specialized accrediting agency that focuses on postsecondary English language programs and institutions. CEA's purpose is to provide a systematic approach by which programs and institutions can demonstrate their compliance with accepted standards, pursue continuous improvement, and be recognized for doing so. CEA conducts accreditation activities in the U.S. and in international locations.

CEA was founded in 1999 by English language teaching and administration professionals, following a recommendation by a TESOL task force comprised of appointees from TESOL, NAFSA, UCIEP, and AAIEP (now EnglishUSA). TESOL provided early operational and financial support for CEA, after which CEA was incorporated as a separate and independent nonprofit accreditation agency. The history of CEA's development is available on the CEA website.

In 2003, CEA was recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education as a national accrediting agency for English language programs and institutions. This recognition gave CEA the distinction of being the only specialized accrediting agency for English language programs and institutions in the U.S. In 2005, the Commission expanded its mission to include the accreditation of English language programs and schools outside the U.S. CEA experienced steady growth in the number of accredited programs and institutions thereafter, and in 2013, when federal legislation (P.L. 111-306, also known as the "Accreditation Act") took effect, requiring that all English language programs seeking to admit non-immigrant international students be accredited by a USDE-recognized accreditor, CEA grew rapidly. CEA now accredits over 330 programs and institutions, each listed in the CEA Directory of Accredited Sites available on the CEA website.

1.2. Mission and principles

CEA's mission establishes its purposes. The Commission regularly reviews the mission; it was last revised as part of CEA's Strategic Planning process in 2021.

CEA's Mission

> The mission of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation is to protect the interests of students and promote excellence in the field of English language teaching and administration, through accreditation of English language programs and institutions worldwide. CEA achieves its mission by advancing widely held standards to foster student success and continuous program development through a rigorous process of regular self-assessment and peer evaluation.

CEA's accreditation process comprises an eligibility application, workshop, self-study report, site visit, and accreditation decision. Site visits are conducted by qualified professionals from the field who are trained as peer reviewers. In addition to accreditation process activities, the Commission oversees continued compliance with standards and CEA requirements, as well as conducts regular systematic review and revision of its standards.

In doing so, CEA is committed to practices and values that exemplify model accrediting agencies and high-functioning nonprofit agencies. The Commission actively seeks ways to enhance the accreditation process, further develop the agency's ability to meet the needs of its constituencies, and ensure that site reviewers and commissioners have the knowledge and training to consistently apply the standards and follow CEA procedures.

1.3. The philosophy of CEA accreditation

The focus of CEA accreditation is students. Throughout the *CEA Standards for English Language Programs and Institutions*, reference is made to how the program or institution meets its mission and provides quality language education for the students it serves. The CEA philosophy is that an English language program or institution worthy of accreditation demonstrates that it provides the student services and programs described in its materials; is student-centered; provides a program that supports its mission; and has the resources, fiscal and human, to assure that students are well served. This philosophy prevails throughout the review process.

CEA accreditation is not intended to impose a rigid uniformity of educational objectives, operations, or theoretical content upon a program. Since programs and language institutions in the field may have different objectives, each is judged in light of its own mission in accordance with the *CEA Standards.*

Thus, in keeping with its mission, values, and philosophy, the *CEA Standards* and these *CEA Policies and Procedures* seek to

1. advance standards and promote excellence in English language instruction and administration
2. protect the interests of students within accredited programs and institutions and assure the quality of programs and institutions for students and the public
3. provide an objective means to review the quality of programs and institutions, using accepted standards of the profession through voluntary peer review
4. provide trained and experienced professionals to take part in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement of programs and institutions seeking accreditation
5. publicly recognize programs and institutions that meet standards
6. provide a structured and unbiased process to guide programs and institutions through the accreditation process, ensuring their quality and commitment to continuous improvement.

1.4. CEA values

CEA's approach to accreditation is grounded in sound and established principles of professional leadership, inclusion, and operational integrity, as expressed in the CEA values.

Leading through Advancing Standards

We lead by setting widely accepted standards in English language instruction and administration and by ensuring that the standards reflect current best practice in language teaching, learning, and administration.

Advocating for Students

We recognize the students' need for appropriate, effective, language-learning opportunities. We believe that students have a right to the instruction and services promised by the program or institution.

Respecting Different Educational Approaches

We believe excellence takes many forms. We respect the variety of missions, goals, and models of English language programs and institutions. We recognize the rights and responsibilities of each program and institution to identify and implement its educational philosophy, methods, and approaches in its cultural and economic environment while meeting the standards.

Supporting Success

We believe in the potential of each program or institution to achieve accredited status, and we support programs and institutions in their efforts to meet the standards.

Promoting Continuous Improvement, Development, and Learning

We believe that the standards and the accreditation process provide the basis for program self-evaluation, improvement, and, ultimately, development of quality programs for students. We encourage administrators, faculty, and staff in English language programs to become involved in a process that offers an opportunity for individual learning and growth. We also encourage continuous learning and growth for CEA volunteers and staff.

Acting with Integrity and Care

We are committed to serving our community with professional integrity. We strive to maintain open communication, transparency, accountability, confidentiality, respect, consistency, and fairness throughout the accreditation process. An ethic of care pervades the work of reviewers, commissioners, and staff.

Embracing Collaborative Judgment

We acknowledge the power of collaboration in both the program review and the decision-making process. We value the expertise of members of the profession, the wider professional community, and the accreditation professionals who participate in the process of self-study and review.

Valuing Diversity

We strive to respect and embrace diversity amongst all stakeholders and believe that acting at all times with a spirit of inclusiveness and equity plays an important role in achieving our mission of protecting the interests of students and promoting excellence in the field.

1.5. Recognition by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education

Following rigorous review by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), CEA was granted recognition by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in 2003 and has maintained recognition through regular renewal reviews. This recognition verifies that CEA is a reliable authority as to the quality of education in the field and that it complies with the Department's criteria for recognition, which are the requirements stated in federal regulations CFR 34 Part 602. CEA is recognized by the Secretary of Education to accredit both programs and language institutions. A description of the recognition process and a list of recognized accreditation agencies is available on the U.S. Department of Education website.

1.6. The Department of Homeland Security, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, and the Accreditation Act

The vast majority of intensive English language programs and institutions within the United States serve international students who are admitted to the U.S. as non-immigrants and require visas to enter the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) division that oversees certification of schools to admit international students is the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). An intensive English language program or institution must be certified by SEVP to issue the document (Form I-20) to prospective students which allows them to apply for student visas to enter the U.S.

In 2010, P.L. 111-306 was enacted; this legislation, also known as the Accreditation Act, requires that English language schools that seek SEVP certification to issue Forms I-20 be accredited by an accreditor recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). Thus, important purposes of CEA accreditation are to provide programs and institutions a means to show that they meet the requirements of the Accreditation Act and provide SEVP with a means of identifying schools that comply with the Act.

1.7. The structure of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation

The governing body of CEA, the Commission, has 13 members, 11 of whom are elected. The Constituent Council, formed of representatives of accredited programs and institutions, is the body responsible for electing commissioners to serve on the Commission. Two public members, who are not elected by the Constituent Council, are appointed by the Commission to serve on the Commission. The Commission elects the chair.

CEA is a nonprofit corporation, and the Commission has the fiduciary responsibilities of a board of directors. The Commission is responsible for setting CEA policy and making accreditation decisions. In addition, commissioners are appointed to standing committees that conduct the business of the Commission.

1.7.1. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee (EC) comprises the chair, the chair-elect, the treasurer, and the secretary (the executive director, ex officio, without vote). Except for accreditation decisions, the Executive Committee is authorized to act on behalf of the Commission on all issues, as necessary, between regular Commission meetings. The Executive Committee also sets the agenda for Commission meetings.

1.7.2. Finance Committee

The Finance Committee develops and monitors fiscal policies, and reviews the annual budget prepared by the executive director and presents it to the Commission.

1.7.3. Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee identifies candidates for election to the Commission and prepares the annual ballot.

1.7.4. Standards Compliance Committee

The Standards Compliance Committee monitors reporting and compliance with the *CEA Standards* following accreditation and hears and acts upon complaints about accredited programs and institutions.

1.7.5. Standards Review Committee

The Standards Review Committee is responsible for reviewing and recommending revisions to the *CEA Standards*.

1.7.6. Policies and Procedures Committee

The Policies and Procedures Committee reviews proposed amendments to the *CEA Policies and Procedures,* prepares recommendations, and drafts amended language for Executive Committee and Commission review and adoption.

1.7.7. Appeals Board

Appeals Boards are assembled as needed to hear appeals of accreditation decisions.

1.7.8. Constituent Council

The Constituent Council, comprising the primary contacts of accredited programs and institutions, may nominate, and votes to elect candidates to serve on the Commission. The Constituent Council may also make recommendations for revision of the *CEA Standards* and the *CEA Policies and Procedures*.

1.7.9. CEA Staff

The Commission employs a professional staff headed by an executive director to support the Commission's work, serve constituents and the public, and conduct CEA operations. The CEA office performs all administrative functions.

Complete information about the Commission is included in Section 3: Commission Governance, Administration, and Evaluation and in Section 18: Committees of the Commission.