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Fall 2011



DETC NEWS



DETC NEWS - Fall 2011

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Story ideas, feedback, letters to the editor and other reader submissions are encouraged and should be sent via e-mail. Please put “DETC NEWS SUBMISSION” as the subject line of your e-mail.

The Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) a nonprofit, voluntary association of accredited distance study institutions, was founded in 1926 to promote sound educational standards and ethical business practices within the distance study field. The independent DETC Accrediting Commission is listed by the United States Department of Education as a “nationally recognized accrediting agency.”

The Accrediting Commission is also a charter member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

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Executive Director's Diary

Accreditation: In the Fight of its Life?

by
Michael P. Lambert
Executive Director



Winston Churchill once said that he always wanted to serve with a group of committed men engaged in a desperate struggle, the outcome of which was uncertain.

As one who has spent almost four decades making a living as an administrator of an accrediting association, I do not share Churchill's desire, as events swirling around a once staid and unremarkable American institution—non-governmental accreditation—are sweeping all us into uncharted and turbulent seas. And certainly, the outcome of what will happen to accreditation is uncertain.

For the past 3 years, voluntary accreditation, once widely hailed and credited being one of the most effective forces in shaping American higher education into being the most impressive, enviable and admired in the world, has recently come under some unfair criticism from those who

do not have even a passing understanding of its true purposes.

Up until recently, accreditation has enjoyed widespread, implicit trust by the public and government as a dependable, reliable indicator of academic quality and ethical practice in an institution or program. It has stood the test of time.

Accreditation remains an enduring American institution, despite the complaints about it, and is still a pervasive force in higher education. And contrary to what issues forth from its blogging critics, it continues to enjoy the strong support of the academic community, employers, counselors, parents and students looking for an education.

There is a debate taking place about the true role of accreditation in the 21st Century: should it be an enforcer of laws or a peer evaluator? Is it a cop or a consultant?

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(Executive Director's Diary, continued)

Are these two roles mutually exclusive?

In DETC, we have worked to find a middle ground between compliance enforcement within the overall construct of peer-group accreditation.

Accreditation is hardly perfect. But overall, most informed observers will agree that it has done its job well. It remains the best idea we have ever come up with to determine what represents quality in education. It is difficult to imagine a better way to determine academic quality, other than through the use of educational expertise on a volunteer basis by qualified and experienced educators themselves. What other system offers a more dependable indicator of academic quality to the public? It needs to be better appreciated for this alone.

Today, some 80 recognized organizations accredit more than 7,000 institutions and 19,000 programs serving more than 24 million students. In 2008-2009, there were 54,823 volunteers available to accrediting organizations, of which 19,423 volunteered their time to accreditation. The financial support allocated to volunteers across all accrediting organizations for this timeframe was \$21,195,248.¹

It is difficult to imagine what the nation could do replace this well-developed system for evaluating academic quality. The professional judgment exercised by this legion of volunteers is an asset that is not quantifiable and one that needs to be preserved.

In recent years, vocal and highly-placed critics are questioning accreditation's value, trustworthiness and effectiveness. It seems everyone is getting into the act of how to reform higher education, and accreditation has become a favorite whipping boy for many reformers.

The critics of accreditation charge that accreditation is:

- An "old boys club," or the proverbial "fox guarding the henhouse";
- Too dependent for its financing on the fees paid by institutions;
- Too secretive in its decision-making;
- Focused on counting the books in the library and not looking at outcomes;
- Conducted too infrequently; and
- Too slow when it comes to eliminating the "bad apple schools" through adverse actions

Overall, the critics of accreditation seem to feel that accreditation needs to step up and do much more in the area of assuring institutional compliance with state and federal regulations, assuring accountability for the billions of tax dollars being expended on higher education and better informing the public about the performance of institutions and the achievement of their students.

As Judith Eaton, President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) wrote recently in an open letter to Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA):

Government now questions whether simply holding accreditors accountable for having and maintaining standards and processes is sufficient. Officials are more and more inclined to decide the standards and processes for which accreditors are accountable. Govern-

¹ The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *The CHEA 2009 Almanac of External Quality Review*, (CHEA, 2009), 4-7.

ment is taking a next step to determine the content and level of expectation of accreditation standards and how various accreditation processes are to be carried out.²

Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), a legislator who has been an outspoken critic of accreditation, wrote individual letters to several Federally-recognized accrediting associations this past March and said,

*Current law affords accrediting agencies wide latitude in determining standards of academic quality and approval processes. But that latitude leaves you with an important responsibility. The federal government, taxpayers, and students depend on your judgment and deserve assurances that your agency is weeding out low-performing institutions...Looking at the current state of higher education, it is reasonable to question whether accrediting agencies have been living up to this responsibility.*³

Dr. Eaton has also written, “Accreditation is being shaped by the changing face of higher education, the amount of money at stake, the view of some higher education as essential and the drive for public scrutiny and accountability, all captured by the emerging domination of the relationship with government over accreditation’s relationship with institutions.”⁴

2 Judith S. Eaton, “Open Letter to Senator Harkin,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 16, 2011.

3 Durbin, Richard J. “Letter to Michael P. Lambert,” March 14, 2011

4 Judith S. Eaton, ed., *Reflections on the Future of Accreditation* (CHEA, 2011), vii.

The Purposes of Accreditation, Then and Now

In one sense, the critics of accreditation have projected onto the once-venerable accreditation enterprise a new, more compliance-centric set of duties and purposes not envisioned by the founders of the movement.

One of CHEA’s publications defines accreditation succinctly:

*Accreditation in the United States is a means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers. An institution or program that has successfully completed an accreditation review has in place the needed instructional, student support and other services to assist students to achieve their educational goals.*⁵

Traditionally, accreditation has been viewed as a voluntary, peer-group process set up to:

- Identify academically sound and high quality institutions and programs for public purposes; and
- Stimulate self-improvement in institutions through continuous self-study and planning.

“Accreditation,” writes Judith Eaton, “exists to assure that baseline expectations of academic quality are met and to assist with improving quality....Accreditation is the voice of the professional community

5 The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *The Value of Accreditation*, (CHEA, 2010), 1.

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(Executive Director's Diary, continued)

speaking to the worth of its efforts.”⁶

Since the mid-1980s, new purposes/roles have been added by the stakeholders and users of accreditation, notably by government, including

1. *Gatekeeping function*: accredit only trustworthy institutions that can then receive public funds;
2. *Consumer protection function*: handle student complaints; provide data on student performance; publish outcomes data on institutions; and,
3. *Compliance function*: police compliance with state and federal laws; monitor sales recruiting activities.

How accreditation addresses its critics in the coming years will determine if it will enjoy a robust future.

DETC's Brand of Accreditation

Speaking from the perspective of my nearly 40 years of experience in the field, I have come to cherish the tremendous good accreditation has done to improve institutions and ensure students get the best possible education or training experience. Accreditation's contributions to improving education and protecting the students who study at a distance are beyond priceless.

In our view, any accredited institution delivers on its promises to its students. It behaves with honesty and integrity. It gives value for the tuition it receives. Its students achieve the stated outcomes for a particu-

lar program. In a word, it is an institution meriting the public's trust. And when a student graduates from a DETC institution today, he or she is happy. Just about every graduate—96% was the average for all DETC institutions in 2010—said that they would recommend their alma mater to a friend for enrollment.

Among the 107 DETC accredited institutions today, some of them founded a century ago, there exists an enthusiastic and unconditional support for the 56 year old DETC accreditation program. Senior DETC institution executives continue to volunteer their precious time to devote to a genuine “peer group” accreditation.

Overall, the DETC membership views our particular brand of accreditation as vital to their own strategic goals, essential to gaining the confidence of students, and critical to their institutional improvement efforts.

Perhaps the most salutary perceived benefit, from the DETC institutions' viewpoint, is that accreditation has truly helped transform their institution into a more effective, stable, successful and student-centric organization. Every DETC on-site evaluation generates a fact-filled document called a “Chair's Report,” which not only reports on compliance with standards for accreditation, but also contains several dozen suggestions for enhancement and strengthening of curricula, student services, teaching strategies and practical ideas in how to meet stated missions and goals.

As one DETC CEO said, “DETC represents not only an invaluable third party endorsement of our academic quality, it also provides value-adding insights and suggestions for our continuous improve-

6 Judith S. Eaton, ed., *Reflections on the Future of Accreditation* (CHEA, 2011), vi.

ment program. We would be hard pressed to go out and try to buy this insight.”

If you were to watch DETC’s recently-released history, *The American Way to Learn* (www.theamericanwaytolearn.com), it is clear the single most transformative and influential force in helping our sector gain public acceptance was the DETC accrediting program, founded in 1955, and going stronger than ever today.

DETC has taken a practical approach to the challenges posed by the critics of accreditation. We believe that we have found a way to address the issues of compliance enforcement with various laws and rules within the framework of voluntary accreditation. The culture within the DETC community is to strive for 100% compliance with all standards, laws and stakeholders’ expectations for ethical conduct. It is simply the only way to do business.

Among some of the recent initiatives undertaken by DETC to earn the public’s trust are these:

- A comprehensive outcomes assessment program, with bright-line metrics customized to specific types of institutions, not a “one size fits all” standard.
- A requirement for every institution to make disclosures of student performance using a common DETC Consumer Information Disclosure form.
- Short, three-year grants of initial accreditation and a maximum five year grant thereafter.
- Comprehensive email surveys of random samples of students.
- Specific, prescriptive “rules of the road” for ethical recruiting and marketing.
- A national, prescriptive and consumer-friendly tuition refund policy

- Strengthened accreditation standards for assessing financial condition, outcomes, graduate programs, and dozens of other changes designed to enhance the DETC method of evaluation.
- Stringent, DETC-imposed limits on Title IV participation levels: No more than 75% of institution revenues may come from Federal Student Aid (as compared to 90% for all other for profit institutions); only degree-awarding institutions may participate in Title IV; and each institution seeking to participate in Title IV must first undergo a special on-site evaluation by DETC to assess its readiness to handle the complex program.

The Spotlights Are Turned On

A number of groups have started to undertake the task of evaluating accreditation and developing various solutions to what they see as accreditation’s systemic shortcomings.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act is scheduled to be renewed in 2013, and already interested parties are preparing for new legislation that is sure to be proposed that will have a dramatic impact on the future of non-governmental accreditation.

Key efforts to evaluate, with an eye toward transforming, accreditation that are currently underway include:

The CHEA Initiative: The CHEA Initiative seeks to (1) enhance accountability in accreditation and (2) sustain a balance and distinction between accountability to the federal government and the academic work of accreditation – its focus on insti-

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(Executive Director's Diary, continued)

tutional mission and independence, peer/professional review and quality improvement. Through the Initiative, CHEA is working to build consensus for action on the issues of greatest importance to the accreditation and higher education communities.⁷

NACIQI: The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity has undertaken a long term inquiry on accreditation and has invited expert testimony. The inquiry is addressing 3 key issues: 1) Regulatory Burden and Data Needs (the regulatory burden and costs of accreditation to institutions, students and taxpayers and the data gathering and reporting required on the part of institutions and accrediting organizations), 2) “The Triad” (federal, state and accreditor entities and their roles, responsibilities and capacities) and 3) Accreditor Scope, Alignment and Accountability.

NACIQI is also considering such questions such as :

- Does the current model of accreditation still work given the changing landscape of higher education with new and different providers?
- Does the current regulatory structure foster or impede innovation? What about access?
- How can accreditation and higher education be more responsive to the public in terms of accountability and transparency?
- Are accrediting agencies being over-

managed by the federal government?

Congress: The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions has conducted a number of hearings on postsecondary education over the past year, and one of the issues that will be on the agenda for future hearings is the topic of accreditation.

GAO: The Government Accountability Office has conducted a number of studies and issued reports on accreditation as it relates to federal student funding programs, including military tuition assistance and the G.I. Bill programs.

The Wish List

We cannot predict with certainty what the future holds for accreditation, and how it will change—or be changed—to accommodate the interests of all its stakeholders.

From my experience in having worked in the field for many years and having served on hundreds of accrediting teams, and having seen all the good that has been accomplished by accreditors, I respectfully offer these suggestions to those who undertake the job of changing what has worked well for so long:

1. Keep the **volunteers** in voluntary accreditation. They are invaluable to the academy and the government. It is **professional judgment** of peers that sets apart America’s approach to education assessment. Preserve the ability to exercise unfettered judgment, and avoid the temptation to reduce evaluation of education quality to the level of a State Car Inspection program—complete with 49 quality checkpoints.

⁷ The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *The CHEA Initiative: Building the Future of Accreditation*, (CHEA, 2011), 1.

2. Be careful with the political arithmetic. Avoid the temptation to impose arbitrary, numeric standards and a homogenizing set of metrics on something that is impossible to measure solely with numbers: a quality education.
3. Do not abandon the “inputs” to quality learning in favor of “outputs.” Both are needed for a balanced evaluation. Good schools have good physical plants, great teachers, sterling student services, etc. An institution or program could conceivably produce impressive output numbers but remain a less than quality learning experience for students.
4. Reject the rush to have “federalization” of a non-governmental enterprise. Do not expect voluntary accreditation to do government’s “police work.” Accreditors do not have any police powers, subpoena powers or the ability to force compliance with regulations.
5. Remember that one of the important roles of accreditation is to stimulate and encourage institutional self-improvement. To jettison this role would be tragic for students.
6. Find a solution to the vexatious problem of post-adverse decision school litigation. Litigation is unduly expensive, debilitating, and much too lengthy. All accrediting associations might do well to consider mandating binding arbitration for aggrieved institutions, as DETC has attempted to do.⁸
7. Finally, find a way to strike a reasonable balance among the needs of students, the needs of government, and the needs of the institutions. This may require

the creation of a wholly new system to make institutions eligible for Federal aid programs while not deforming the historic strengths of accreditation.

American higher education remains the envy of the world. It is clear that accreditation helped the academy get to where it is today. It is also clear that accreditation is being asked to change dramatically to meet evolving needs of the nation for a competitive workforce and an educated population.

The challenge now is to find the best ways for accreditation to help America live up to its vaunted reputation as having the best institutions anywhere.

I can only hope that in seeking to transform accreditation, we do not deform or destroy it in the process.

As Dr. Kenneth E. Young, former President of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, once wrote: “Institutions should recognize that the greatest value of accreditation is perhaps as an evaluative tool, that institutions should use the accrediting process as an unequalled opportunity for improving educational quality.”⁹

8 Michael P. Lambert, “Is Arbitration a Solution?,” in *Reflections on the Future of Accreditation* (CHEA, 2011), 42-47.

9 Kenneth E. Young, *Understanding Accreditation*. (Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1983), 35.

Report From the Accrediting Commission

The DETC Accrediting Commission met on June 2-3, 2011 and took the following actions and reported the following developments:

Election of Two Commissioners at DETC Annual Business Meeting

Mr. Robert Mayes, Jr., President of Columbia Southern University was elected to his second term as an institution member on the Commission.



Mr. Robert Mayes

The Mayes family started CSU in 1993. Mr. Mayes's first position at CSU was managing the accounting function where he set up the accounting procedures for the general ledger, payroll, accounts payable, and accounts receivable.

He later established a system for deferring tuition income, created business policies, and recently successfully led the University through its first two financial audits. Other duties and responsibilities Mr. Mayes has held over the years at CSU include marketing, curriculum development, operations management, admissions, database administration, network administration, inventory management, student retention, student services, and human resource management.

Mr. Mayes led CSU throughout its tran-

sition from a correspondence university to a completely online university, and guided the University through its initial accreditation in 2001 and most recent re-accreditation in 2011. He also coordinates CSU's partnerships with the University of West Alabama, University of North Alabama, and the University of West Florida. Mr. Mayes became President of CSU in 2005.

Under his leadership CSU continues to grow extensively and has doubled in enrollment, staff, and in-house faculty. Mr. Mayes is a member of the DETC Business Standards Committee and the DETC Finance Committee. Mr. Mayes holds an MBA from Capella University. Mr. Mayes joined the Commission in 2009, his current term will expire in 2014.

Ms. Ann Rohr, President of Weston Distance Learning, was elected to her first three-year term as an institution member. The elections took place on April 4, 2011 at DETC's 85th Annual Business Meeting in Williamsburg, VA. Ms. Rohr replaces Dr. David Curd, who finished his maximum allowable terms



Ms. Ann Rohr

Ms. Ann Rohr, a native of New York, has served as the President of Weston Distance Learning since 2003. She has

18 years of education experience, joining Weston in 1993. Weston consists of three postsecondary distance education schools—At-Home Professions, U.S. Career Institute, and McKinley College. Both U.S. Career Institute and McKinley College were established during Ms. Rohr's tenure.

Ms. Rohr is dedicated to increasing awareness and acceptance of quality distance education. She was recently recognized for spearheading the acceptance of distance education by The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB). The NCBTMB is viewed by many states as the premier national certification board for massage therapist licensure. Ms. Rohr petitioned the NCBTMB upon learning they did not accept distance education. As a result, the NCBTMB established a distance education task force, naming Ms. Rohr as the Chairperson.

Ms. Rohr served as the Conference Chair for the DETC's 84th Annual Conference in April 2010 and is a member of the DETC's Business Standards Committee. In addition, she served as an Educational Standards Evaluator for on-site visits for the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education & Training (ACCET) and the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC).

Ms. Rohr completed her undergraduate studies in Public Relations at Rowan University. She is an active member of the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), and

the Colorado Association of Career Colleges and Schools (CACCS).

Institution Re-Accredited

The following institutions were re-accredited:

- Allied Business Schools/Allied American University/Allied National High School/Allied Schools, Laguna Hills, CA (*effective August 31, 2011*)
- American College of Technology, Saint Joseph, MO

Show Cause Issued

The following institution was issued a Show Cause:

- Kona University, Kailua-Kona, HI

Change of Location

A change of location for the following institutions was approved:

- Ashworth College, Norcross, GA moved to 6625 The Corners Parkway, Norcross, GA

Voluntary Resignations of Accreditation

- Air University Extension Course Program, Maxwell AFB, Gunter Annex, AL (*effective March 31, 2011*)
- Universidad FLET, Miami, FL (*effective March 31, 2011*)

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(Report from the Accrediting Commission, continued)

New Courses/Programs

New Courses or Programs were approved at the following institutions. For a full list of approved courses and programs, please visit the DETC website.

- Allied American University
- Allied Business Schools, Inc.
- Aspen University
- Atlantic University
- Blackstone Career Institute
- California Coast University
- California Southern University
- Diamond Council of America
- Penn Foster College
- University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences
- Yorktown University

Policies, Procedures and Standards

To view a list of standards, policies and procedures that were given final adoption, as well as a list of proposed changes out for public comment, please visit the Commission Actions page of the DETC website at www.detc.org/actions.

All DETC institutions must be in compliance with the policies, procedures and standards by January 1, 2012.

Applicants for Accreditation and Re-Accreditation in 2011

The following institutions have applied for DETC initial accreditation or five year re-accreditation:

First Time Applicants:

- Apollos University, Huntington Beach, CA
- California Institute of Arts and Technology, San Diego, CA
- Grace Communion Seminary, Glendora, CA
- Hawthorn University, Whitehorn, CA
- Shiloh University, Kalona, IA
- University of Fairfax, Vienna, VA
- Trinity College of the Bible and Theological Seminary, Newburgh, IN
- University of Fairfax, Vienna, VA

Applicants for Five-Year Re-Accreditation:

- American Public University System, Charles Town, WV
- Westlawn Institute of Marine Technology, Stamford, CT

Revision of 2011 Directory of Accredited Institutions

The 2011-2012 *DETC Directory of Accredited Institutions* is now available on DETC's website at www.detc.org and select "Publications." *Please Note: This Directory is updated in June each year. For the most up-to-date information, please check the DETC website.*

Next Meeting

For consideration of initial and reaccreditation, the next regularly scheduled meeting of the DETC Accrediting Commission will be January 19-20, 2012. All matters to be considered by the Commission should be brought to the attention of the Executive Director by no later than December 1, 2011.

Art Instruction Schools:

A History of Creating Great Artists



Art Instruction Schools

Creating Better Artists Since 1914

For almost one hundred years, Art Instruction Schools (AIS) has had one mission: to create better artists. The century-old distance education program has helped thousands of students develop the critical skills necessary to improve their art. Through correspondence, Art Instruction Schools, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has been able to reach tens of thousands of students across the United States and Canada through the means of “artistic distance education.” With the AIS “Class of One” philosophy, students have exclusive access to proprietary textbooks, materials, and instruction from approved staff. Even though the basic curriculum and method remains unchanged, the means of communication with prospective students and surrounding communities is headed for a transformation.

In 1914, The Bureau of Engraving, known as The Bureau, of which Art Instruction Schools is a division, trained commercial artists for their printing businesses. As competitors “hired away” their staff artists, the burgeoning need for artistic people trained as commercial artists led to the start of the Federal

Schools Inc., now known as Art Instruction Schools

With the curriculum focused on drawing, design, and commercial illustration, students would have access to instructors while completing the program in their own home, a practice that was gaining large acceptance across the United States. AIS originally recruited students through advertising in local publications across the country. Prospective students began their interactive relationship with the school by completing a comprehensive Art Test and an in-home interview, a practice that continues to this day.

Early in the twentieth century, Art Instruction Schools was becoming concerned about the integrity of the education programs offered by correspondence schools. As a result, AIS played a significant role in the formation of the National Home Study Council (NHSC) Art Instruction Schools became a charter member and has continued to be actively involved in working towards continuous improvement in education standards and outcomes.

(continued)

(Art Instruction Schools: A History of Creating Great Artists, continued)

Between 1890 and World War II, it is estimated more than 60 million students enrolled in correspondence schools. Twenty-sixth president Theodore Roosevelt stated, "I look upon instruction by mail as one of the wonders of the age." The beginning of the 20th century provided a population of those who wanted to be educated, from those who left the country for the big city, to immigrants from other nations. Art Instruction Schools was one of the early entries into this new field of education services.

Everyone who enrolled with Art Instruction Schools completed an art test which featured the famous "DRAW ME" heads. Profiles of "Tippy the Turtle," "Cubby the Bear," "Petey the Pirate," and numerous female models were featured in magazines, newspapers, even on the back of matchbooks. These icons gave AIS a recognizable feature that was in the public eye, introducing Art Instruction Schools as a household name. AIS even used celebrities to gain popular recognition; in 1956, entertainment personality Bob Hope received his own "DRAW ME" head for an Art Instruction Schools campaign in newspapers published across the country.

Over the years, the Art Instruction Schools training program has helped develop a list of successful artists. One of the most recognized is Charles Schulz, the creator of the Peanuts comic strip. Schulz enrolled in the program from AIS in the midst of one of the worst economic depressions. He went on to serve in WWII, and after his return to the

US, he started drawing comics for local publications in the Twin Cities. Schulz gained local recognition and eventually became an instructor with Art Instruction Schools. While working at AIS he developed the Peanuts comic strip, which became widely popular with its many characters, some based on Schulz's school colleagues (Charlie Brown, Linus Maurer, and Frieda Rich/Lucy).

In addition to Schulz, Rose Edin, another well-known AIS graduate, has become a spectacular watercolorist whose techniques are unfathomable. A well-traveled artist, her scenes of Europe and Asia have brilliant color. Even though her paintings utilize such a wide use of color, her compositions remain peaceful and illuminating.

Carl J. Melichar began his studies with AIS in 1966 at the age of 14, and has become one of the country's most recognized wildlife artists. Dogs are often featured in Carl's artwork with the dogs' facial expressions clearly creating a character outside the canvas. In 2011, Carl was featured in the *Illustrator* magazine published annually by Art Instruction Schools.

Oscar Ortiz was Art Instruction Schools' Graduate of the Year in 2005 and was featured in that year's *Illustrator*. Ortiz uses everything from mixed media, to colored pencil, to pastels, most of which depict brightly colored portraits and design. Ortiz makes it clear that the course of study offered by Art Instruction Schools helped him attain the critical skills to not only improve his art, but accomplish his dream of becoming a professional artist.



Everyone enrolling with Art Instruction Schools completed an art test, which featured the famous “DRAW ME” heads, including (from left) Tippy the Turtle, Cubby the Bear, Petey the Pirate, and one of many numerous female models.

The list of successful AIS graduates is endless. Art Instruction Schools is fortunate to have many of these artists’ work permanently displayed in online and on-site galleries.

Over the years, Art Instruction Schools relied on television advertising and other media to reach those who wanted to become better artists. Today, the avenues of the internet and social media have expanded the horizons which AIS initiates and maintains contact with current, former, and prospective students. For example, the Art Instruction Schools Facebook fanpage allows alumni, prospective students, and fans to communicate with online administrators about their artwork, dreams, and questions about enrollment. Art Instruction Schools is also undergoing a transformation to communicate with students through the means of an online portal. The school aims to embrace the new technologies of the 21st century by using new methods such as online enrollment, virtual communication with instructors, and the overall showcasing of student and alumni artwork.

But what makes Art Instruction Schools so successful? The answer is their students. After completing the course, students are surveyed about their experi-

ence with the school. In 2010, 98.6% of students who completed the program indicated they were satisfied with their experience at AIS. These surveys also help Art Instruction Schools maintain a high level of learning outcomes. Textbooks are digitally printed on-site and personalized. Content and teaching methodologies are continuously updated to help ensure the student receives the best learning experience possible.

Even though Art Instruction Schools is headed for a transformation, the teaching philosophy and customer service will remain unchanged. Students will continue to have access to instructors while they experience the “Class of One” philosophy. Students will be exposed to the successful drawing techniques that have helped thousands become accomplished artists. Overall, Art Instruction Schools is thrilled to be entering a new arena of communication while conserving the century-long tradition of creating better artists.

Article by Liz Donehue, Online Community Manager, Art Instruction Schools. For more information on Art Instruction Schools, visit their website at www.ArtInstructionSchools.edu.

Harrison Middleton University:

Using Great Books of the World to find Unifying Ideas

Harrison Middleton University is a great books, great ideas, great conversations, distance learning university that offers undergraduate and graduate education in the humanities with concentrations in imaginative literature, natural sciences, philosophy and religion, and social science and promotes student-faculty scholarship through research, discussion, and the development of collaborative publications. The university was founded in 1998 with the belief that the study of liberal arts is both timeless and timely because it focuses on the persisting questions of human existence and bears directly on the problems faced today.

At a time when an increasing number of adults are recognizing the benefits of lifelong learning, the authors contained in the *Great Books of the Western World* provide the medium in which to search for fundamental knowledge and unifying ideas.

"I have discovered that most of their thoughts and concerns, though centuries old, are still appropriate to today's world," said Doctor of Arts student Alan Pew. "Studying the works of these great authors has provided me with cogent, insightful information and ideas useful in contemplating modern issues."

The *Great Books of the Western World* are considered great because they speak to us in more than one way. The authors raise questions, and their different inter-

pretations reveal a variety of independent and yet complementary meanings. In following the great authors across time, students find that they introduce, support, or criticize each other. In this sense, the authors are conversing, and in this way, they draw the reader to take part in a continuing conversation.

"These thinkers have clearly indicated that there is a basic and common human nature that transcends time so even today we act and react to things much the same way as our ancestors," said Edgar Daniels, Doctor of Arts. "One message I've gotten is that while history doesn't quite repeat itself, it certainly seems to rhyme. There have been numerous times in my readings that I've thought that the author, although writing hundreds or even thousands years before, could just as well be describing events or concerns today."

Doctor of Arts Ellin Iselin agrees, adding, "I have learned there in fact are 'conversations' throughout history."

At Harrison Middleton University, students learn to establish a set of questions to which all authors can be interpreted as giving answers. By summarizing the opposing answers of authors, students define and analyze the issues, themes, and problems of western civilization. The goal is not only to gain knowledge of the past, but to also reach for the best wisdom of all the ages.

As a software engineer, Bachelor of Arts in Humanities Jacob Lentz needs "to



Harrison Middleton University tutor Dominique Wagner researches one of the *Great Books of the Western World* before contacting a student for a one-on-one phone conversation.

solve difficult problems on a daily basis. The intensive reading, writing, and discussions with tutors have measurably increased my ability to reason through different perspectives of a problem, whether that be a complicated technical problem, a tough business decision, a controversial political issue, or a dogmatic religious interpretation.”

Robert Hutchins suggests students are not meant to be “tourists on a visit to ancient ruins or to the quaint productions of primitive peoples.” Instead, “we believe that in the passage of time the neglect of these books in the twentieth century will be regarded as an aberration, and not a sign of progress. In this view the disap-

pearance of great books from education and from the reading of adults constitutes a calamity.”

As we have amassed a comparatively rich life of material comfort, we have become poorer morally and intellectually because of the absence of great books in our educational systems and in our daily lives. It is important for students to learn and understand the beginning and development of Western civilization before they can identify solutions or provide answers. Students read primary texts and come to their own understanding because their thoughts are not filtered through secondary sources or commentary by profes-

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(Harrison Middleton University, continued)

sors or modern philosophers. This is why Harrison Middleton University considers great books the best educational instrument for education today.

"One comes away with not only an understanding of what someone wrote, but also with a grip on the idea at the root of the piece read, and the cognitive tools to do something more than collect facts in the brain," said Philip Stewart, Doctor of Arts.

Based on this educational philosophy, Harrison Middleton University believes that students should be able to study the subjects that interest them. Students design their own program of study using guidelines provided in The Great Conversation: The Cornerstone course. By perusing and skimming the Great Ideas introductory essays, students can begin to explore those topics that interest them. In the two volumes of the *Syntopicon*, there are nearly 3,000 topics parceled out among 102 Great Ideas propagated by a general consensus about the major motifs of western society contained within the texts. In addition, the Inventory of Terms contains approximately 2,000 topic suggestions and concepts.

"By creating my program of study, I accept responsibility of my learning. It is tempting to see learning as the responsibility of the teacher to impart education on the student, as if the student is a passive vessel into which knowledge can be poured. The student who chooses what to study denies passivity, actively pursuing knowledge. He seeks it," said James Keller, Bachelor of Arts in Humanities.

Doctor of Education Paul Jackson acknowledges, "[I]t was daunting, but with careful attention from my tutors and mentor, I was able to not only begin to see the great value in this type of learning, but also have come to embrace it as a very efficacious learning modality—that is, by preparing my program of study in this manner I have a much more vested interest in my doctorate. I have more ownership of the process and therefore more accountability."

In contrast with standard lecture format, students participate in one-to-one telephone discussions with tutors.

"The tutor does not tell one what the text means or how to understand it. He helps the student understand it for himself. He brings to light passages that address a question, but does not hand over a direct answer as an authority," said James Keller, Bachelor of Arts in Humanities. "He too is trying to understand the text. The student and tutor work together in a partnership to increase both their understanding. This is truly a remarkable method of study. It promotes reflection and clarity of thought."

As an Associate of Arts in Humanities student, Colette McClain, appreciates how "the tutors skillfully engage you in dialogue while respectfully acknowledging your responses. They then guide you on to another level of understanding through their insightful questioning."

In addition to completing discussions, students are expected to synthesize what they have learned in writing end of course essays.

"By reading and analyzing the works of scores of authors from Plato to Wittgenstein, I have developed a firmer grasp



Doctor of Education student Paul Jackson said Harrison Middleton University's program was daunting, but it left him with more ownership in the learning process.

of the creative process as well as unexpected insights into the internal dynamics of spoken language, sharpened critical thinking, and improved mastery of the written language," said Phillip Perry, Doctor of Arts

The exercise of writing is itself a learning process, said Doctor of Arts Richard Bilby, and the "program has helped me hone my writing skills. Harrison Middleton University's methodology of progressive draft development of end of course essays enables the student to be a better scholar. The tutors, discussions, and grading of drafts of the final essay is unlike any academic or military program in my experience."

Upon completion of a degree program, graduates achieve the ability to think critically about major ideas and to engage in discussion about fundamental questions in western thought. All degree

programs help the student develop lifelong critical, analytical, synthetic, and problem solving skills through discussion and essay writing. These skills allow the student to engage in society with wisdom and knowledge gained from across western civilization.

"Lest people think a distance-learning program is easy, I found that Harrison Middleton University is the most demanding and toughest graduate program I have been in," said Carole Jonas, Master of Arts in Philosophy and Religion. "I appreciate the rigor and demand of excellence, having seen first-hand the lack of academic standards accepted in other graduate courses. That makes Harrison Middleton University the best and most challenging college degree program I have had the privilege of enjoying."

The Northwest Institute of Literary Arts

Drawing Inspiration from the Surroundings



Whidbey Island, population 58,000, is the largest island in Puget Sound, and home to the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts.

So here's one audacious idea: Take a forested island in the far upper left-hand corner of the country, one with no urban center or college or university based on it, and build a complete, accredited, low-residency Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing.

Mr. Wayne Ude, Director of the Whidbey Writers Workshop since its inception, recalls the embryonic conversation that launched it one evening in 2002. The Whidbey Island Writers Association, which sponsors an annual writers conference on the long, squiggly island thirty miles north of Seattle, was pondering ways to grow its organization.

"An MFA would let us grow, but I

guess we'd have to build a campus first," said WIWA Founder Celeste Mergens.

Ude, a writer and former university professor who had taken part in designing the MFA programs at Old Dominion University and Colorado State, replied, "We could do a low-residency program and we wouldn't need a campus."

Defying the tradition of languid "island time," where ambitions sometimes proceed with all the haste of geology, Mergens and Ude took the idea to the next board meeting two weeks later and the board voted "yes."

The State of Washington's Higher Education Coordinating Board authorized the program in 2004, classes began in

2005, the first commencement followed in 2007, and DETC accreditation arrived in 2010. Currently, 30 students are enrolled for a total of 23.2 FTE.

Faculty and staff are paid, but the program is nonprofit. It now functions under the expanded umbrella of the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, which includes the MFA program, Whidbey Island Writers Association, Whidbey Island Writers Conference, and *Soundings Review*, a literary magazine.

Actually, Whidbey Island isn't an unlikely place to have incubated such a literary smorgasbord.

To start with, the island lies within the cultural orbit though not the urban commotion of Seattle. The big city is a 15-minute ferry ride and then a 45-minute drive to the south. The Seattle region is famously a writers' and readers' haunt; it's theorized that the long, dark, wet winters give people plenty of time to do both. Whidbey, the largest island in Puget Sound, has a population of 58,000, among whom are several dozen professional writers and hundreds of amateurs and aspirants. Langley, one of the three incorporated towns on the island, has three bookstores. Its population is 1,035.

There is not one parking meter on Whidbey, but there are hordes of great blue heron, bald eagles, great horned owls, and osprey. Orcas and gray whales frequently circle the island; Langley has a municipal "whale bell" that someone rings at sightings. Coupeville, population 1,831, has a cluster of Victorian architecture, galleries, and antique shops. The island's main economic engine is the U.S. Naval Air Station in the largest town, Oak Harbor; after it trail many small family

businesses and cottage industries and a growing retiree population.

Working Whidbey residents typically patch together a piecework living from whatever opportunities present themselves. There isn't a concentration of wealth or high expectations. That fact is probably responsible for the island's casual friendliness. Said one recent arrival, "I've been here for two years and haven't heard anyone say anything mean."

To date, the Whidbey Writers Workshop is the only nationally-accredited MFA program in the nation that's not attached to a college or university, and as a consequence, it's been free to establish the unique objectives its faculty feels are important. There's an unusual emphasis on "community," which is not typical of writing programs. Its mission statement:

- To produce productive, publishing writers who are prepared for a life of writing;
- To prepare graduates to articulate their understanding of the process of writing, whether in essays, informal or formal teaching or otherwise;
- To prepare graduates to participate in the local, regional and national community of writers.

The residential anchor of the program is two intense, nine-day residencies on the island each year in January and August. The "campus" is the Captain Whidbey Inn, a 104-year-old waterfront lodge that closes to all other guests during the residencies and devotes all its resources to housing and feeding the writers.

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***(Northwest Institute of Literary Arts,
continued)***

It's a stunning setting. The inn overlooks one of the island's great, finger-like coves, a blue indent four miles long punctuated with anchored sailboats and mussel farm rafts. The inn's main building, dating from 1907, is constructed entirely of madrona logs—a cherished Pacific Northwest coastal tree with deep red bark and a gnarly reluctance to conform to architecture. After the inn, it appears that no one ever again tried to find enough straight madrona logs to make a large building. The floors creak, the compact rooms seem to radiate both physical and emotional warmth, and views open in every direction onto cove and lagoon and forest. There are a few useful concessions to the 21st century, such as WiFi. There is vague talk of a ghost, and one faculty member swears that on one dark winter night three years ago his printer spat out three pages of text he'd never seen before, unbidden.

Residency classes are small and informal, so in the August session they tend to migrate outdoors to the inn's gardens or a tent pavilion. In winter, of course, they're indoors in the bar and assorted meeting rooms. Mornings are packed with the curriculum's standard craft, workshop, and directed reading classes run by the resident faculty.

In the afternoons follow a series of hour-long lectures or workshops with a changing rotation of guest faculty—writers, editors, or literary agents. A couple of typical topics from the August 2011 residency: Bill Dietrich, author of both environmental nonfiction books and thrillers,



The non-fiction class meets during one of the two residencies that take place on the island campus each year.

on “switch-hitting” between nonfiction and novels; and author Nancy Rawles on drawing stories and characters from history. Almost every night after dinner, there are readings by faculty, students and alumni.

Among the practical features of the curriculum is a concentrated mini-course during students' final residency on “pitching.” Three associate faculty, two literary agents and an editor work with students to help them prepare their manuscripts for real-world proposals to publishers.

One of the toughest assignments is the “elevator pitch”: You find yourself in an elevator alone with an agent, with just ten seconds to describe your book and sell the idea. Students have been known to work on their pitches for years.

The days at residency are intense. The talk at breakfast, lunch, dinner and the occasional recreational walk up the road skirting the cove is endlessly about writing—the craft, the business, the love of it and the anguish. All this is driven by a passion that’s shared equally by faculty and students.

One of the guest faculty observed after a couple of days at residency, “I can’t tell which are the faculty and which are the students.”

All the courses that begin at residency continue for a sixteen-week online semester using. Classes are small, usually between three and eight. Typically, an instructor will post a written “lecture” at the beginning of each week, accompanied by reading and writing assignments and several provocative discussion questions. An online discussion of the topic will ensue, and students will post their writing assignments for critique.

Students choose one of four genres in which to specialize: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and children/young adult literature (CYA). Cross-fertilization is not only encouraged but demanded; students must take at least one craft class outside their chosen genres. There’s a thesis requirement, of course, and most students take one or two years to write it. The thesis is not an academic research project, but a real-world book-length manuscript—a novel, nonfiction book, or collection of poetry or short stories for adults or children/young adults—of “publishable quality.”

As professional writers know only too well, today “publishable quality” doesn’t mean a commercial publisher will bite. It’s tough out there. To date, the North-

west Institute of Literary Art has graduated 27 students in four years, five of whom have had their thesis manuscripts published or accepted for publication. Three more graduates have had books published or accepted, along with hundreds of essays, stories, and poems.

Students range in age from their mid-twenties into early sixties, and come from an unpredictable array of other professions: lawyer, physician, teacher, journalist, astrophysicist, artist, and computer geek.

Many have a master’s degree in another field; a few have even come in trailing Ph.Ds. They are decidedly not motivated by visions of big money. Most have been dreaming of writing since childhood, struggling to satisfy whatever white-hot internal blaze it is that compels one to write. One current student in his forties said, “I knew I wanted to write science fiction, so I majored in astrophysics at the University of Arizona.” He admits to a little undergrad confusion back there: “It did not occur to me to take writing classes.”

Students may complete the program in as few as two years, which amounts to a full-time load, or take up to six. Since most are working full-time day jobs in addition to their studies, many preserve some creative sanity and take at least three years for the degree. Tuition for the required 60 credit hours and five residencies is \$24,750, not including the residency room and board. The program has qualified for federal student loans, and employs a financial aid officer. Some scholarships are available.

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The Institute holds their residencies at the Captain Whidbey Inn, a 104-year-old waterfront lodge on the island that closes to all other guests during the programs.

(Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, continued)

There are eight faculty members, two for each genre, scattered through Washington and Oregon. All are established professional writers, earning our livings (such as they are) through our writing. All the faculty members have also taught in other programs, and like the students, have done a startling variety of other things: hotel housekeeper, Forest Service trail maintainer, speechwriter, editor, newspaper reporter, boatbuilder. The eight of us have cumulatively published 94 books. Poetry faculty member David Wagoner holds the distinction of having had more poems published in Poetry magazine (127) than any other poet, living or otherwise.

The faculty members are in it because

of their love of teaching and the desire to help contribute to the “community of writers,” as articulated in the program’s core values.

“I teach because I had great teachers,” says Fiction Instructor Bruce Holland Rogers. “I’m paying forward. I teach in this program because I’m free to make each class, and the program as a whole is the experience that I wish I’d had earlier in my career. We focus on the needs of writers in both artistic and practical terms, and we get impressive results.”

Lawrence W. Cheek teaches nonfiction in the Whidbey Writers Workshop. His most recent book is The Year of the Boat, published by Sasquatch Books.

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DETC Fall Workshop: Register Now!



If you haven't yet registered to attend the 2011 DETC Fall Workshop October 16th-18th at the Loews Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville, don't delay—the October 7th registration deadline is just days away!

The 2011 Fall Workshop will be full of informative sessions on a diverse range of topics, including *The State of State Authorization*, *The Culture of Accreditation*, and a presentation from DETC staff on ensuring your institution is up-to-date and compliant with the newly-adopted standards, policies and procedures. Don't miss the chance to have someone from your institution attend this sure-to-be-memorable meeting!

Once again, the cost of the Distance Education Workshop has not increased—rates are \$900 per person for member institutions and \$1,100 per person for

non-members! (Remember, if you're planning to attend the Closing Reception and Banquet on Tuesday, October 18th, you need to purchase a separate Closing Reception and Banquet registration.)

The registration deadline for the 2011 DETC Fall Workshop is **FRIDAY, October 7, 2011**. No Post-Deadline or On-Site Registrations Will Be Allowed. When registering multiple attendees from the same institution, you can use the Promotion Code **DETCOCT11** to receive a 10% discount on Fall Workshop Registration!

For more information on the Fall Workshop, including details on registration and a copy of the full Workshop Program, visit the Fall Workshop website at www.detc.org/2011fallworkshop.

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