



NEWS RELEASE

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Announcing the Formation of the Commission on Regulation of Postsecondary Distance Education

May 23, 2012 -- Former U. S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley and 20 other leaders have been invited to explore the regulation of postsecondary distance education on a new national commission organized by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO).

The Commission on Regulation of Postsecondary Distance Education will invite testimony and information and develop recommendations to address the regulatory costs and inefficiencies faced by postsecondary institutions that must comply with multiple and often inconsistent state laws and regulations when providing educational opportunities in multiple state jurisdictions. APLU President Peter McPherson and SHEEO President Paul Lingenfelter will both serve on the Commission and will assist Secretary Riley in leading its work. The Commission's first session will be June 12, 2012 in Washington, DC.

"The responsibilities for higher education quality assurance and consumer protection in the United States are dispersed among various actors, including accreditors, states and the federal government," said Riley. "In some cases they complement each other, in others they unnecessarily duplicate each other."

The Commission's recommendations will be developed in the context of and with specific reference to issues of appropriate government oversight and consumer protection associated with postsecondary distance education. As the Commission considers options associated with an appropriate and more uniform role for states, Commissioners will need to consider how state regulation should complement the role of the accreditors and the federal government.

"Finding common ground among affected postsecondary institutions and entities with regulatory authority is important for the country," said McPherson. "Innovative instruction through information technology is being employed by colleges and universities of every type to reduce

geographical and scheduling barriers to access. Under the right circumstances, these technologies have demonstrably helped improve the quality and the efficiency of instruction.”

“The importance of technological advances and the related explosive growth of distance education present both challenges and opportunities that shape the Commission's mission,” said Lingenfelter. “We hope the Commissioners will make recommendations that will minimize the burdens associated with quality assurance and consumer protection, while promoting effective systems that will efficiently work together to ensure the kind of quality assurance that the American public expects and demands.”

“To continue providing access to a quality, affordable education, public colleges and universities are offering more online courses,” said Muriel Howard, president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. “However, there is a discordant network of state laws and regulations that unintentionally impede access and need to be reviewed. The answer lies in finding common sense solutions that result in a more uniform structure among the states thus fostering further access and innovation.”

"We clearly need to do better than we now do: better in enabling and supporting much-needed innovation; better in assuring quality across the board; and better in dealing with the ‘bad apple’ issues that have plagued the expansion of online learning. We simply cannot accomplish what we need to accomplish without significantly challenging the status quo," added Marshall A. Hill, executive director of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Two members of the Commission have been deeply involved in related efforts. Paul Shiffman of the Presidents’ Forum, a consortium of large scale distance education providers, has been working with the Council of State Governments to develop an interstate compact with public regulators. Terry Hartle, Senior Vice President of the American Council on Education (ACE), has been staffing ACE’s National Task Force on Institutional Accreditation.

APLU, SHEEO, Education Counsel and many others collaborated in organizing the Commission in order to provide a setting for all the interested parties to consider the issues and make practical recommendations that might be widely adopted. The Commission’s mission and work plan are attached at Appendix B following this announcement.

A comprehensive directory of state regulatory agencies and practices, several essays discussing the issues, as well as links to other resources can be found on the SHEEO website at:

<http://www.sheeo.org/stateauth/stateauth-home.htm> .

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