



Serving the public trust: Observations and lessons learned

"Oh, the places you'll go!" — Dr. Seuss

A few years ago, as my much-anticipated retirement from a career working in a health-related professional association approached, I began to think seriously about how I would spend my time. Thoughts of just kicking back, relaxing and having no schedule but my own certainly ranked very high. But as I started putting together my "bucket list," I knew a worthwhile volunteer project would be included.

My work had provided me with firsthand knowledge of the positive impact volunteers can make through their service. My professional interactions with volunteers had included working with public members on an accrediting board. As I considered the type of volunteer service in which I wanted to engage, I thought about the unique role these individuals had played in protecting the public and their contributions to educational excellence. Serving as a public member of an accrediting board seemed to be a perfect fit and a role in which I would be honored to serve.

Accreditation in the United States is higher education's system of self-regulation. An accrediting agency's

standards, policies and procedures are dedicated to ensuring public confidence in educational institutions and programs through periodic self-examination, evaluation and judgment by peers. The Council for Higher Education and Accreditation's recognition of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs as an accrediting body implies to the general public, government agencies, educational administrators, students and others that CACREP has standards of accountability, including a commitment to involve the public in its decision making and purposes that are in the public interest. Part of an accrediting body's responsibility and accountability is the inclusion of different perspectives in its decision making. Human nature dictates that we like to protect our own. We feel most comfortable with a group of like-minded individuals. So comfortable at times, in fact, that we stray from what might be the best route for all. Public members who serve on accrediting boards remind these boards of the broader responsibility they have to ensure that the public is served, protected and heard in the development and maintenance of quality education processes that prepare future professionals.

Soon after retiring, I set about establishing my criteria for selecting the agencies to which I would apply for appointment as a public member. It was not long before CACREP's search for public member applicants caught my eye. Through its accreditation activities, CACREP works to foster educational excellence, supports programmatic self-improvement and assures the general public of the ongoing availability of well-qualified counselors and counselor educators. Public members have been included on CACREP's board since its inception in 1981. Currently, two public members serve on the CACREP Board. Public members have come from a variety of professional backgrounds and have included educators, lawyers, health care professionals and association professionals. Public representation on the board ensures the inclusion of perspectives that are independent of CACREP and the counseling profession in general.

The future and identity of the counseling profession is in good hands as a result of CACREP's ongoing leadership. An accrediting agency is expected to evaluate each accreditation action, policy decision and standards adoption on the basis of its overall good for the public

the agency serves. Procedures used in all aspects of the process must provide for a system of checks and balances regarding fairness and impartiality. An organizational duty exists to avoid real or perceived conflict of interest, to act in a consistent manner and to ensure that each applicant is afforded the same due process. My experience has been that CACREP takes this responsibility seriously and, by its actions, lives up to these expectations.

As I begin my fourth year (of five) serving on the CACREP Board, I have learned that this board is populated with a diverse and dedicated group of counseling professionals from across the country. They work diligently to carry out CACREP's mission and core values. The breadth and depth of their knowledge and their many contributions to the counseling profession more than assure me that they are among the best and the brightest your profession has to offer. During my time on the board, they have patiently taught me about the counseling profession. I have been able to participate fully as CACREP takes on its full scope of responsibilities and deliberations — making accreditation decisions, managing complaints, adopting and implementing new standards, and developing and revising policies and procedures. CACREP carries out these responsibilities with integrity, due diligence and a strong commitment to serving the public trust. The board is supported by an outstanding staff of knowledgeable professionals who are expertly guided by CACREP's president and chief executive officer, Carol Bobby, a true role model.

CACREP is in very able hands and looks forward to exciting times ahead, including its 30th anniversary in 2011. I'll almost hate to leave. Nonetheless, it's time to get out that bucket list one more time and see what new volunteer adventures I can take on. But it will be hard to top this one! ♦

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