

ACTION AGENDA

Break the link between federal student aid and accreditation.

Accreditation gives students and parents a false sense that certified schools have passed a meaningful test of quality when they have not. By breaking the link, Congress can eliminate regulations that raise college costs and fail to ensure educational quality.

Make accreditors prove their worth.

If accreditation is a valuable service, schools will seek it out even if it is not mandated by the federal government. Returning to a voluntary system will make this happen. Legislators need to remember that accreditors are “private” in name only since power derives from their role as gatekeepers for the federal student loan program.

Break the accreditor monopoly.

At a minimum, the Department of Education and state governments should require all colleges and universities to solicit bids for accrediting services, just as they do for other services. The existing accreditation regime encourages cartel-like behavior and hinders innovation from new entrants.

Ensure student achievement.

Schools and accreditors should provide parents and students with the information they need to determine if an institution successfully teaches its students. Accreditation has tended to focus chiefly on educational inputs, while paying little attention to educational results.

Tell the public what it deserves to know.

As things now stand, poor accrediting evaluations can be hidden. Institutions would be more likely to prevent serious weaknesses if their efforts were exposed to public scrutiny.

Stop the homogenization of higher education.

Congress should end accreditors' ability to interfere with institutional autonomy and self-governance through intrusive and often biased review criteria unrelated to educational quality.

Create a consumer-friendly expedited alternative for reaccreditation.

Congress should establish an expedited accreditation alternative allowing previously accredited institutions to certify key information about measures of academic quality and student achievement in lieu of accreditation visits.

Don't replicate a failed model.

National and state-level policymakers should not apply this failed model to other non-profit institutions or in other contexts. Federal accreditation reduces diversity and encourages costly and bureaucratic intervention without measurable benefit.

Reduce the cost of higher education.

By eliminating the cost of federally-mandated accreditation, Congress can give institutions the freedom to use their own best judgment on how best to carry out their educational objectives.